

Carte Semiotiche 2023

**Fotografia analogica
e fotografia digitale: un riesame**



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Carte Semiotiche
Annali 8

Carte Semiotiche

Rivista Internazionale di Semiotica e Teoria dell'Immagine
Annali 8 - Settembre 2023

Fotografia analogica e fotografia digitale: un riesame

A cura di
Dario Mangano e Miriam Rejas Del Pino

SCRITTI DI
AMAGLIO, BEATO, CRESCIMANNO, DEL PILAR,
FONTCUBERTA, MANCHIA, MANGANO, MIGNANO,
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(*Alma Mater Studiorum* – Università di Bologna, Campus di Ravenna,
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SEDE Università degli Studi di Siena
Via Roma, 56
53100 Siena

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a cura di

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*Fotografia analogica e fotografia digitale:
un riesame*

Orphaned photos in Riggs' *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*

María del Pilar Martínez Linares

Abstract

Digital photography has brought about the proliferation of the image as an essential element of the visual culture in this century. Its inclusion in different disciplines has provoked changes in traditional genres, and the fiction novel has been no exception. Many literary works of fiction include analogue photos that have been digitised to be printed again on paper. One example is Ransom Riggs' *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011). This novel imbricates more than forty-four black and white orphan photographs, an indissoluble part of the narrative. This inclusion not only defies the traditional layout of the novel but also becomes an invitation to explore image-referent and image-representation relationships between and among the text and the photos. Besides, their condition of being orphaned gives Riggs consent to re-use them as powerful narrative tools. This change marks the need to address questions such as how the articulation between the two modes (analogue, digital) feed on each other, how orphaned analogue photographs imbricated in literary contexts undergo a digital process to be then included as narrative modes in paper, point to new materiality of the text, how relocated orphaned photos signal a change in reading practices, how this analysis may expand pre-existing views about the inclusion of photographs in multimodal fiction novels and finally how this imbrication may constitute a starting point for the study of dialogues between orphaned photos and the reconstruction of memory in terms of discursive representations in a digital age.

Keywords: Orphan Photographs; Materiality; Multimodal fiction.

1. Introduction

The present is, without doubt, an era marked by the proliferation of images. In *La visualidad como objeto: El giro pictórico y los estudios de la cultura visual*, Javier Dotta Ambrosini (2015: 39; *my translation*) argues that “the immense amount of graphic images that we see day after day defines a particular visual environment different from that of any other historical moment”. Similarly, Nicholas Mirzoeff (1999: 5) states that visual culture is the socio-historical characteristic of the

present time; this does not depend on the images themselves but on the modern tendency to capture images or visualise existence. The particularity of this current historical moment had already been predicted by W.T.J. Mitchell in the late twentieth century when he announced the pictorial turn. In *Picture Theory*, the author expresses that picture theory stems from “the realisation that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.)” (1994: 16).

Literary production has not remained oblivious to this pictorial turn. This is reflected in the marked tendency to incorporate images and visual resources as ways of narrating. There is a proliferation of the multimodal novel that considers language as one communicative mode among many and, therefore, calls for a careful and attentive analysis of other modalities such as typography and images.

Wolfgang Hallet (2009: 130) uses the term multimodal to refer to literary works which, unlike traditional literature that uses the printed word as a single mode of significance, incorporate a vast range of non-verbal iconic representations, in various semiotic methods, such as photographs, graphs and diagrams. For Hallet, the modes are verbal narrative discourse, photos, graphics, documents, works of art and typography as long as their inclusion is not occasional but, on the contrary, “a systematic and recurring integration of non-narrative and non-verbal elements in novelistic narration”. He says that the multimodal novel denotes a type that seems to have emerged visibly over the last twenty years and is substantially different from the traditional novel, which relies totally on the written word in printed form. While still relying to a considerable extent on the traditional language of the novel, multimodal novels incorporate a whole range of non-verbal symbolic representations and non-narrative semiotic modes. Consequently, the novelistic narrative must now be considered to be an integration of the narrative novelistic mode along with other written modes, as well as various non-verbal modes such as (the reproduction of) visual images like photographs or paintings, graphics, diagrams and sketches or (the reproduction of) handwritten letters and notes (Hallet 2009: 129).

As argued by the same author (*Ibid*: 131), the multimodal phenomenon presents a significant challenge towards new forms of reading and new forms of literary production that alter the realm of the written word. Hallett affirms that “readers will perceive the modes as an integral part of the novel and will thus incorporate them in their cognitive construction of the narrated world and narrative meaning. In this regard, Jarryd Luke (2013: 18) affirms that, although there are investigations that have contributed significantly to the field of study of the hybrid novel (as he prefers to call the multimodal story), there is still a need for a more explicit analysis of functions that underlie the use of visual images.

The defiance and the need for more profound studies in the field of multimodal literature informed my research interest in general; the exploration of the use of photographs in this novel led to the present study. Thus, this article deals with the analysis of orphan analogue photographs which have been digitised and then brought back again to the print medium as analogue photographs in the fiction novel *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs in the book version of 2011 (Fig. 1). This study aims to point to the existence of a form of materiality less acknowledged by the reader which signals the emergence of new ways of reading works of fiction.



Fig. 1. *The Levitating Girl*. Cover photo in *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by R. Riggs

2. *The novel*

Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children is Riggs' debut novel and belongs to the contemporary multimodal category. Published by Quirk Books in 2011, it stayed seventy weeks on The New York Times Best Sellers list and reached the top on April 29th, 2012. *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (MPH henceforward) novel is the first of the Peculiar Children series, a series completed by *Hollow City* (2014), *Library of Souls* (2015), *Tales of the Peculiar* (2016) and *A Map of Days* (2018), *The Conference of Birds* (2020) and *The Desolations of Devil' Acre* (2021).

Riggs' first work is a crossover novel which addresses a diverse, cross-generational audience. The story is told through a selection of forty-four vintage found photographs that Riggs borrowed or bought from private collectors and a few others he took or found himself to write a picture book. On the advice of Jason Rekulak, the editor at Quirk Books, Riggs agreed to use the photographs as a resource to put a narrative together. The narrative Riggs draws on these photos is about Jacob Portman, a sixteen-year-old boy who grew up listening to his grandfather's incredible stories.

The story is told as a multimodal novel that particularly narrates the life of Abe Portman, Jacob's grandfather, and his childhood in a children's home on an island in Wales. One day, Jacob finds that a mysterious creature has mortally wounded his grandfather, Abe. From that moment on, the boy who is the narrator of the story sets out on a mission to uncover the meaning behind the photos his grandfather kept in a box and the old man's cryptic last words: "Find the bird. In the loop. On the other side of the old man's grave. September third, 1940" (2011: 37), to learn about his grandfather's past and thus make some sense out of the stories the old man used to tell him.

As far as orphaned photos are concerned, in an interview printed in MPH, Riggs (2018: 358) affirms that photographs came first in this story. In another interview, the author explains that he has always been attracted by the hobby of collecting old photographs because "they were all orphaned and devoid of context questions" and adds that old photographs of people are "like a little sliver printed on paper, the only piece of them left". So, Riggs' systemic and recurring inclusion of more than forty-four black-and-white photographs, an indissoluble part of the narrative in this novel, not only defies the traditional layout of the fictional literary genre but also becomes an invitation to explore the relationships established by the image-referent and the image-representation as well as how these photographs are imbricated in the narrative.

3. Defying the traditional layout, new materialities of print

The combination of nonverbal and verbal modes, in this particular case, the combination of photographs and verbal modes in *MPH*, also highlights a clear tendency to get engaged with the materialities of print. According to the theorist Grzegorz Maziarczyk (2011:186), the reader's engagement with the materiality of the novel is provoked when a supposedly purely verbal medium is endowed with properties of another medium or media –visual ones. On this topic, Mussetta (2017a: 9) claims that the growing fascination for the visual and its effects, plus the inclusion of technological breakthroughs in the printed text, allow readers to naturalise the fact that some novels “are to be looked at as much as they are to be read”. Contemporary fiction novel writers seem to be increasingly exploiting the potential of visual media in their fiction. In the case of *MPH*, the photographs become modes which signal contemporary writers' growing tendency to use multi-semiotic strategies to engage readers in multisensory experiences which disrupt the regular standards of the genre.

According to Grzegorz Maziarczyk (2011: 170), any component of a printed codex, be it a font, a page layout or the overall construction of the book, can be deformed to draw the reader's attention to its visual materiality. He explains that the manipulation of font and page layout is often combined with incorporating graphic devices into the book (*Ibid*: 172). *MPH*, then, matches Maziarczyk's definition of visual materiality in general terms and is in line with his thoughts on the inclusion of photographs as graphic devices that point to the meta-referential aspect of the novel since their inclusion generates the dialogue between different semiotic modes and emphasises the link that connects the lives of the characters that inhabit the story.

There is a dialogue between Jacob and his father that illustrates this:

Is this about Halloween?
What are you talking about?
You know from the picture” (89).



Fig. 2. *Boy in Bunny Costume*. Private collection

The dialogue emphasises the salience of the photograph as a material mode, which indicates the connection between the story being told and the photo, which, because of its visual condition, claims to be read and interpreted to progress in the reading of the narrative.

The photographs in *MPH* are a plus. They are attributable to the homodiegetic narrator and, as such, are indexes of the reality of the one person who uses them. Novels that make use of this device, as Wolfgang Hallet points out, allow the reader to look at the artifacts produced and collected by fictional characters and “[in]

this way characters from the fictional world move closer to the reader's real world since a photograph is indexical of the reality of the person or object depicted, as well as of the [photographer] user who [took] uses the picture" (Hallet 2009: 144). In the novel, the pictures are Abe Portman's property, a fictional character; thus, the fictional ownership of the photographs in this fictional work constructs the textual world at a given historical time and fulfils the basic functional criterion of metareference, i.e., "the eliciting of a medium awareness" (Wolf 2009: 25).

On this topic, Mussetta (2017a; *my translation*) says, "Amid the homogenising power of globalisation and virtual environments, readers seem eager to find in these new narratives a certain illusion of authenticity, some anchoring – although fragile, rudimentary and transitory – with the concrete daily reality in its materiality". The suggestion that the photographs included in *MPH* are the grandfather's and then casually found by Jacob goes against the conventional use of illustrations (photographs in the case of this study) in a text. Maziarczyk (2011: 172) affirms that "traditionally, illustrations are an element of the text which is not attributable to the homodiegetic narrator. The author and/or editor adds them to reinforce what is described in the narrative content visually". Yet, the following fragment about Jacob's discovery of the cigar box that contains his grandfather's photographs opposes this view and corroborates that the photos in *MPH* are attributable to the homodiegetic narrator:

I locked myself in the bedroom. It smelled of stale air, shoe leather, and my grandfather's slightly sour cologne. I leaned against the wall, my eyes following a trail worn into the carpet between the door and the bed, where a rectangle of muted sun caught the edge of a box that poked out from beneath the bedspread. I went over and, knelt down and pulled it out. It was the old cigar box, enveloped in dust-as if he'd left it there for me to find.

Inside were the photos I knew so well: *The Invisible Boy*, *The Levitating Girl*, *Boy Lifting Boulder*, *The Painted Head*.



Fig.3. *The Invisible Boy*.
Private collection.



Fig.4. Original photo
album, page 17.
Private collection.



Fig.5. *Boy Lifting Boulder*.
Original photo album, page
18. Private collection.

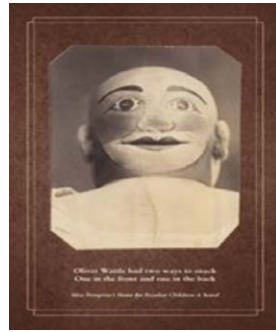


Fig.6. *The Painted Head*.
Original photo album, page
19. Private collection.

The narrator's finding of the box with the photographs causes readers to get involved in the pretense of the fictional character's discovery. By using this strategy, Riggs creates an effect that causes the fictional world of characters to move closer to the readers' real world and produce, in turn, an illusion of truth. Jacob says about one of the photos: "I thought about it, looking at the photo and then at my grandfather, his face so earnest and open. What reason would he have to lie?" (Riggs 2011: 20). By means of this quote, Riggs invites readers to participate in Jacob's same brooding and encourages them to look at the photograph one more time as if this photo entailed a shared discovery and at the same time involved readers in the quest of rectifying the old man's story about his past in Wales. In this way, Riggs' complex semiotic construction, which entails the combination of different media such as fiction, the novel, the print, the analogue and digital photographs, and the verbal and visual modalities fulfil the purpose of documenting that an event actually happened, that a person actually existed.

"The photograph in a book is, obviously, the image of an image", says Susan Sontag (1973: 2) but in the case of *MPH*, the photographs allegedly discovered by Jacob are indexical of real-life people since they were, in fact, discovered by the photograph collectors listed on page 354 or by Riggs himself. The author says:

They were lent from the personal archives of ten collectors, people who have spent years and countless hours hunting through giant bins of unsorted snapshots at flea markets and antique malls and yard sales to find a transcendent few, rescuing images of historical significance and arresting beauty from obscurity-and most likely, the dump. Their work is an unglamorous labour of love, and I think they are unsung heroes of the photograph world. (Riggs 2011)

It is interesting to note here that Riggs' praise of the collectors' job in the epilogue of the novel and the inclusion of the names of the nine private collectors he lent or bought the photographs from (354-355) are data which certify the validity of the photographs as authentic documents intentionally interwoven in the print medium to endow the novel with a visual dimension. Their recurrent occurrence may be understood as a means to draw the reader's attention to the visual materiality of the page.

4. *New ways of reading fiction*

Christine Schwanecke (2007) says, “Interleaving of photographs with prose opened my eyes to the possibility of a new way of reading” – this ‘new way of reading’, which depends heavily on the combination of two semiotic systems, is to a great extent characterised by metareference.

The visual elements, the photographs in this fiction, are not illustrations in the traditional sense, but in Hallet’s words, “they are part of the narrative world, produced by the narrator and directly woven into the narrative discourse by the device of drawing upon them continuously in ekphrastic passages” (Hallet 2009: 133). Because of this, a new form of reading that integrates different modes should be promoted for readers with different reading traditions, according to which the verbal mode is the most important one and the visual is just complementary, illustrative, or ornamental.

Photographs remind readers of the fact that they are dealing with a reality mediated via print and, at the same time, that they are contributing to the reconstruction and understanding of this mediated reality. N. Katherine Hayles (2002: 124) emphasises that the recursive relationship between a photograph’s material form and its subject matter produces effects only a printed codex can produce; she affirms that “The dynamic interplay between words, nonverbal marks and physical properties of the page work together to construct the book’s materiality”. Thus, the materiality of the book functions as a “container for the fictional universe” (*Ibid*). In *Writing Machines*, Hayles (*Ibid*: 130-131) writes that “Focusing on materiality allows us to see the dynamic interactivity through which a literary work mobilises its physical embodiment in conjunction with its verbal signifiers to construct meanings in ways that implicitly construct the user/reader as well”. For her, materiality is realised by the verbal and non-verbal interplay, a characteristic that is salient in *MPH* and marks the apparent existence of the fictional world. Hayles, then adds that:

The physical form of the literary artifact always affects what the words (and other semiotic components) mean. Literary works that strengthen, foreground, and thematise the connections between themselves as material artifacts and the imaginative realm of verbal/semiotic signifiers instantiate open a window on the larger connections that unite literature as a verbal art to its material forms. (*Ibid*: 125)

Another important issue related to the interplay which occurs when reading photographs concerns the role of readers. *Our Beautiful Display* (Fig. 15) is one example of Riggs making us reflect on this role. In this case, Jacob, the narrator, marks how surprise diminishes by means of the repeated viewing of these photographs, and familiarity with the weirdness of the photographs takes over. “The more I studied the pictures, the more familiar they began to seem” (Riggs 2011: 114). Jacob’s feelings can be explained through Sontag’s words when she refers to how viewers respond to what they see in photos (cfr. Sontag 1973). She says that photographs shock insofar as they show something novel and that the shock of photographed atrocities wears off with repeated viewings. It is this repetition of the weird that makes the photo become familiar and even possible, and although the viewer may suppose that the photo has been manipulated, the supposition will not rule out the possibility, the presumption that something was like “what’s in the picture”. By this, she means that after repeated exposure

to images, the seen becomes less unreal, less strange, and more usual. Her views are in line with the inscription this photo bears, a photo which describes the bombardment as “beautiful”.

The occurrence of the photographs is no minor detail since their frequent appearance in the book gradually immerses readers in a reading dynamic that combines the verbal written and the non-verbal visual modes (photos, in this case). Some examples of this reading dynamics occur very early in the book. One of the first is when Grandfather Abe draws Jacob’s and in turn, the reader’s attention to the photos by saying: “Hey, look at the brain on this one!” (Riggs 2011: 14-15), or: “Sure he’s got a head my grandfather said grinning. ‘Only you can’t see it’”, and: “He slipped me another photo”. “So? What do you see?”.

The verbal, written and non-verbal visual modes constitute a unity that has to be read as such since they complement each other and depend on each other. In Oberhuber’s words (2009), “Riggs was merely fascinated by the eeriness of old snapshots and contented with building a fantasy world from them, make us mull over the role of the reader who, because he is also a viewer, can no longer read in the same way”.

5. Interplay of Photos as Containers of a Fictional Universe

According to John Pier (2011: 98) intermediality is a paradigm which has contributed significantly to a deeper understanding of cultural representations that employ more than one medium or that must in some way be apprehended against the backdrop of or in relation to one or more media of a different kind.

Intermediality in *MPH* plays an active part in the creation of Rigg’s fictional universe and, consequently, entails the readers’ active participation in the comprehension of the media involved in this novel. Yet, not all the photos call for the same kind of interplay as far as readers are concerned. Some photographs require a weak interplay; this is the case of those photos that merely reduplicate the information the text refers to. On the other hand, there are other instances in which the interplay is stronger when the information given in the verbal or written passage contradicts the visual information contained in the photograph it refers to or when the verbal contextualisation of a photograph is incomplete. In these cases, the interplay draws the readers’ attention to the different medial ways the information is made accessible. The best examples of weak interplays are the photos *The Invisible Boy* (Fig. 3), *The Levitating Girl* (Fig.4), *Boy Lifting Boulder* (Fig.5), and *The Painted Head* (Fig. 6), while the stronger interplays are produced by the untitled photographs on page 60 (Fig. 12), page 62 (Fig. 13), page 225 (Fig.7), page 230 (Fig. 11), and by *This is Why* (Fig. 11), to name a few.

So, the fluent interplay between text, medial form and surrounding discourses invites the readers to assemble all the pieces.

The Hatbox, for instance, demands a stronger interplay since its verbal contextualization is incomplete and requires the readers’ reading and interpretation of the visual mode. The information given in the text passage amplifies the visual information given in the photograph it refers to. The writer announces: “I found a hatbox just inside the closet. It was tied up with a string, and in grease pencil across the front was written” (Riggs 2011: 224).



Fig.7. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 225. Private collection.

It is in the photograph's inscription "Private. Correspondence of Emma Bloom. Do not open" where readers make sense of the text, which is announced by the narrator. Enoch's Dolls (Fig. 8) is another example of strong interplay.



Fig.8. *Enoch's Dolls*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 216. Private collection.

Jacob, the narrator, says: "Arranged around the boy was a whole menagerie of wind-up men, staggering around like damaged robots" (Riggs 2011: 214). The photograph does not portray "the menagerie of wind-up men" the text mentions, but a boy holding two dolls. Moreover, the interplay between the verbal and non-verbal modes is enhanced because this photo does not exactly resemble its corresponding verbal, written description since it includes information not given in the photo.



Fig.9. *Emma's Silhouette*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 229. Private collection.



Fig.10. *Miss Peregrine's Silhouette*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 63. Private collection.

Similarly, though in a different manner, *Emma's Silhouette* (Fig. 9) is another example in which requires a strong interplay between modes and consequently calls for the reader's strong intervention. In fact, *Emma's Silhouette* disrupts the narrative flow and compels readers to turn pages in order to go back and look at another photograph, the photograph at page 63 (Fig. 10), which is located at a physical distance in the book. The similarity between the photos suggests and predicts that Emma will be Miss Peregrine's successor or that she is in line with the home's head. So, the narrative is interrupted but pushed forward at the same time. The prediction is not signalled verbally, which is why this photo becomes a meta-referential icon in this story and constitutes an instance that entails a kind of reading far from conventional. Emma's silhouette resignifies Miss Peregrine's and becomes a token of future presence. In the photo, Emma is caressing a bird in a cage, an icon which represents Miss Peregrine in this way; the symbol of the bird signals Emma's allegiance to her. The photograph on page 63 faces left, as someone looking to the past, and the photograph on page 229 (Fig. 9) faces right as someone ready to face the future. This photo, then, stands for Emma's acceptance of Miss Peregrine's legacy, a prediction that is also suggested by the photograph on page 228. The three photos require the reader's participation in order to make sense of the narrative and, thus, become an invitation for readers to build analogies between them.

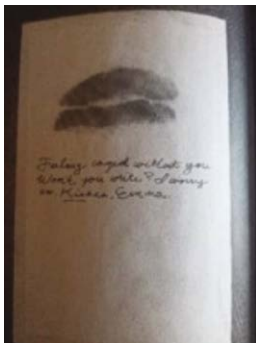


Fig.11. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 230. Private collection.

Fig. 7 and Fig. 11 also point to a case of strong metareferential salience. They not only elicit analogical reflections on the reader but also help readers certify the

presence of love tokens such as love letters and love notes, which promote the reconstruction of memory (Abe and Emma's love story). The photo of the hat box signals the presence of a material object, a love token with an inscription which stresses the link between the material, the visual and the verbal at the same time that it asserts the existence of a past love while the photo of the kiss turns the symbol of that love, the kiss, into a material artifact.

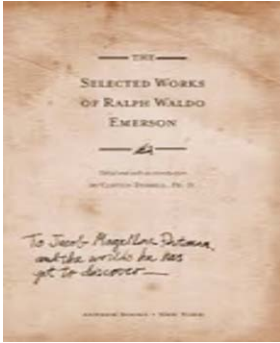


Fig.12. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 60. Private collection.

Fig. 12 also functions as a means which signals to the book's materiality since it functions as a mirror of the actual title page of *The Selected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. The inscription on this page suggests that the “worlds-in plural- Jacob has yet to discover” relate to books. Another relevant example is the photo of the letter (Fig. 13). It is announced by means of a reference to it which says “the letter was handwritten on fine, unlined paper in looping script so ornate almost calligraphy, the black ink varying in tone like that of an old fountain pen. It read:”

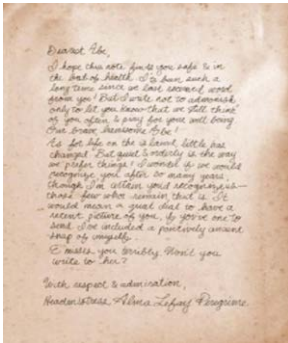


Fig.13. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 62. Private collection.

Once again, readers are invited to read the photo in order to make sense of the narrative, so, once more, photos become essential in the reading process. The typography, the layout, and the fact that the reader is made to combine genres to make sense of the story Jacob tells are markers that emphasise the book's materiality. The photo of a letter indicates the dependent relationship between two media: the letter and its photo included in another medium: the book. Besides, the photo of a letter, which involves the construction of memory and identity, is an artifact that acts as a filler for time-lapses and as a memory aid inserted in print format. “It’s been such a long time since we last received word from you!” The

letter Miss Peregrine writes to Abe says. By reading this letter, Jacob confirms the affectionate bonds between his grandfather Abe and Miss Peregrine and between Abe and Emma. In the letter, Miss Peregrine writes: “E. misses you terribly” (*Ibid.*: 62).

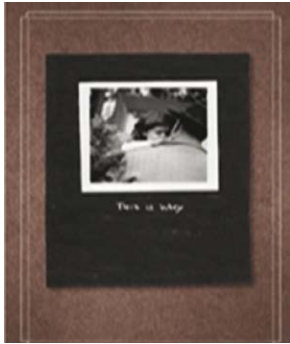


Fig.14. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 231. Private collection.

Another example which calls for an active interplay is the photograph on page 231 (Fig. 14). Here, the reader is left to interpret the verbal and non-verbal relations this imbricated photograph entails. The photo is roughly described, but the captions, which are equal to its title, push readers into an emotional interpretation of its meaning via iconic, indexical and diagrammatic connections. By reading the photograph, readers understand that Abe never returned to the island because he had a child and that his duty as a father hinders him from living by the side of his love. There are no extended explanations, just a photo with a caption which reads “This is Why”.

MPH invites the reader to read, thumbing to and for its pages in order to build meaning-making connections between the verbal and the non-verbal modes, in the same way Jacob (the main character and narrator of the story) does. In so doing, the implications entailed by the systematic occurrence of black-and-white photographs assert the book’s relevance by signalling its own materiality. So, the effects produced by the inclusion of analogue photos, which underwent a digital process to be then inserted back in paper in Riggs’ novel, are inextricably and intentionally bound up with the print medium since they draw the reader’s attention to its visual materiality.

Markus Hartmann (2014) says that: “what is important about the analogue book is that it is the final expression of the artist in terms of how he wants his work to be seen and presented (as to size, order, look), and this can no longer be altered by the viewer (at worst, it can be viewed under poor light conditions!)” (Hartmann 2014). All digital media I have seen so far can be altered or adjusted by the viewer – in terms of size, contrast, layout, etc. – depending on the technique used. On the other hand, the book is made by the artist, the publisher, and the whole team involved with a final idea.

Consequently, the occurrence of photographs in contemporary fiction can be interpreted as an attempt to prove the validity of the book form in reaction to the threat of obsolescence posed by other media, especially digital.

6. Orphan photographs and the reconstruction of memory

Tina Campt (2012: 87) defines orphan photographs as works whose owners, producers, the subjects featured in them, or their heirs are no longer available. Their absence or anonymity makes it difficult to validate the circumstances in which the picture was taken, unravel the narratives behind it, and trace the patterns of its consumption and distribution. This condition of being orphaned gives Riggs the chance to adopt the photos he uses in his works and, in so doing, relocate them in a different context and build narratives which have them as a principal focus. The reusing of found photographs allows, then, for new interpretations. In Emily Cohen's words (2004: 720), "Every time the image meets viewers, the semantics of images are continually refashioned". Also, in *The Rebellious Orphan: adopting the Found Photograph* Ewa Stańczyk (2018: 1042-1043) says about lost photographs, "Their biography has been disrupted, their trajectory left undocumented. Their survival has been fortuitous, their preservation-incident" and then, adds that orphan images, in particular, "become conduits of memory, whereby their mysterious pasts inspire storytelling and, inevitably, a radical reinterpretation". In fact, having no stories of their own, any orphan photo may be moved from its context of production, turned into a narrative mode and consequently, given new possibilities of meaning. Besides, their passage from analogue into digital and back to paper, their condition from orphaned into adopted, and their inclusion in a different context from that in which they were created thrusts upon them new chances of distribution and circulation and interpretation. Moreover, in *Finding Purpose in the Photographs of Others: Ransom Riggs and Isabelle Monnin*, Michèle Bacholle (2019) say: "These are pictures that they did not take, that they did not even own at first, and provided them with a context and a meaning since the original one(s) is/are lost". In the case of *MPH*, Riggs' surrogate parenting of these peculiar photos results in the creation of this fictional novel, which stimulates the reader into action. Karen Cross (2017: 43), in *The Lost of Found Photography*, also refers to orphan photos in these words, "I prefer to see the photograph as a "transitional object" and argue for both a greater recognition of the complexities of the process of appropriation, but also for an unbounded notion of "use", as a means of releasing the potential of the "found" photograph, as a point of imagining for new realities". Certainly, this is just what Riggs does. He imagines new fictional realities for these found photographs, which would have been lost otherwise, bringing them back to life in a different context, medium and mode. Other authors refer to the use of orphan photos in fictional works; for example, Christine Schwanecke (2011: 150) refers to these photos as relevant artifacts which help to construe memory and surrogated identity, she writes: "The reader gets to see the actual pictures which the fictional characters look at and talk about. This sudden movement from the diegetic level of the characters to the extra-diegetic level of the actual pictures – and back again – also adds to the novel's general meta referential character". Besides, this movement between levels adds authenticity to the representation of past memories, which serve as the means for the construction of memory, the identity of the characters in general and the reconstruction of the grandfather's past. Because of this, it is possible to assume that the node that connects the written, verbal mode with the visual one is the memory of similar views the reader has already stored in mind; in other words, the construction of memory and identity is achieved by turning photographs into

artifacts that act as fillers of time lapses and memory aids inserted in print format. In reference to memory, identity and photos, Kross and Peck (2010: 136) also have a say for them “Remembering functions much like photography, returning to us fragmented remains of the past. But photographs also work in the way that Freud’s screen memories do in that the photograph is a memory that displaces another memory that is forgotten or suppressed”. Moreover, Piotr Sadowski (2011: 366) acknowledges that photography has two opposite effects. One effect gives us a pleasing illusion of timelessness, and the other painfully reminds us of the ravages done by time. Both effects are emphasised when photographs are interwoven in the narrative as modes which constitute the means through which the passage to and for, past and present, is represented. In *MPH*, one of these effects, the illusion of timelessness, construed by the peculiar children who remain invariably young, is represented by photographic images. This effect is also replicated by the text by provoking similar sensations in the readers. Jacob, the narrator, recounts: “‘I’m either one hundred and seventeen or one hundred eighteen’, said a heavy-lidded boy named Enoch. He looked no more than thirteen. ‘I lived in another loop before this one’, he explained” (Riggs 2011: 169). The photo and the text are imbricated to emphasise the idea of timelessness, a characteristic of the peculiar children who never age.

Moreover, the photographic representations in *MPH* not only give readers the possibility of viewing what the fictional character sees in a homodiegetic fashion but also contribute to the filling of spaces of a fictional past time and create paths which allow readers to understand the time this story is set in. An example of this is the photograph *Our Beautiful Display* (Fig. 15), which signals the night Miss Peregrine’s home was bombed (September 3rd 1940): “Now and then came a muffled blast I could feel in my chest like the thump of a second heart. Followed by waves of broiling heat, like someone opening and closing an oven right in front of me” (*Ibid*: 171), Jacob remembers.

As far as the reconstruction of memory is concerned, Marita Sturken (1999:178) makes clear that “memory does not reside in the photograph, but is a product



Fig 15. *Our Beautiful Display*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 173. Private collection.



Fig 16. *Victor*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 220. Private collection.



Fig 17. *My Bombshell*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 227. Private collection.

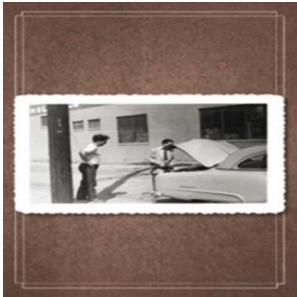


Fig 18. *A Hunting Trip*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 254. Private collection.



Fig 19. *Abe and Emma*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 348. Private collection.

of it". In fact, the actual people portrayed in the photos owned by actual private collectors allow readers to enter the fictional world described in this novel. The photos which by filling time or acting as memory aids act as pointers to the book materiality are Abbe Napping (Fig. 20), Fig. 12, Fig. 13, Boy in Bunny Costume (Fig. 2), The Cairn Tunnel (Fig. 21), Miss Finch's Loop (Fig. 22), Victor (Fig. 16), untitled photo 225, My Bombshell (Fig. 17), A Hunting Trip (Fig. 18) and Abe and Emma (Fig. 19). Abe Napping (Fig. 20) for example, reminds Jacob of his grandfather's strange hobby. Jacob says:

He'd spent half his life collecting them, travelling to out-of-state gun shows, going on long hunting trips, and dragging his reluctant family to rifle ranges on Sunny Sundays so they could learn to shoot. He loved his guns so much that sometimes, he even slept with them. My dad had an old snapshot to prove it. (Riggs 2011: 27)

The photo corroborates Abe's fears of being caught unawares by monsters of another world. Another photo which marks the presence of the fictional world is *The Cairn Tunnel* (Fig. 21). It represents the door which leads the characters into the time loop.



Fig 20. *Abe Napping*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 28. Private collection.

Fig. 21 and Fig. 22 pretend to give evidence of an imaginary place and allows readers to get into the fictional world.

As a narrative mode, these photographs disclose a portal to a virtual reality. “The photographs point to other, hidden patterns of ‘dark voids’ and ‘unbridgeable

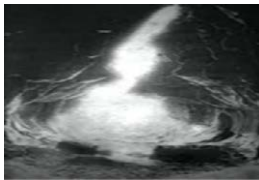


Fig 21. *The Cairn Tunnel*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 126. Private collection.

gaps’ that only imagination can transform into a narrative of shape and meaning” (Ljungberg, 2006: 247). Thus, these photos help readers picture what an ingress



Fig 22. *Miss Finch’s Loop*. Photograph from the original photo album, p. 162. Private collection.

to a loop may look like. Because of this, they become an example of photos as fillers of dark voids. “Speaking of which, I may have a picture of-yes, here it is. An ingress point if ever there was one!” (Riggs 2011: 160). “This is Miss Finch and one of her wards in the magnificent entryway to Miss Finch’s loop, in a rarely used portion of the London Underground. When it resets, the tunnel fills with the most terrific glow” (*Ibid*: 161).

Photographs in *MPH* are documents that constitute powerful markers which authenticate the narrative by documenting the life stories of the characters. The photos are images of Jacob’s grandfather’s past life that Jacob did not share. Susan Sontag says: “Photography is acquisition in several forms. In its simplest form, we have in a photograph surrogate possession of a cherished person or thing” (*Ibid*: 121), and photographs in *MPH* do this; they help readers to take possession of a space and a time which is not theirs. The photographs furnish evidence of the existence of the characters and, at the same time, give the reader a sense of surrogate possession of their fictional lives.

The role of the photos as modes which structure the narrative justifies the fact that the photos are more than mere illustrations. They are story prompters and non-verbal texts that complete the narrative's verbal mode. The analysis enables us to affirm that the functions the photographs play in this novel align with Riggs' thoughts. In *MPH*, photographs play different roles: triggers of visual memories, links to the past as magic portals to a virtual fictional world, and structures that reveal hidden narrative patterns. All in all, they are structuring devices that signal narrative patterns which drive the story forward. Multimodal printed literature calls for understanding the relevance of the study of non-verbal modes as essential devices that are interwoven in the construction of the narrative.

7. *Digital-Analogue*

Analog gives us the joy of creating and possessing real, tangible things in realms where physical objects and experiences are fading. These pleasures range from the serendipity of getting a roll of film back from the developer, to the fun in playing a new board game with old friends, to the luxurious sound of unfolding the Sunday newspaper, and to the instant reward that comes from seeing your thoughts scratched onto a sheet of paper with the push of a pen. These are priceless experiences for those who enjoy them. (Sax 2016: 238)

The inclusion of black and white photographs in the paper requires fidgeting of the object to and for. Digital formats may entail fidgeting of a different kind, but there are some things that the screen cannot give, something is lost in the screen: quality first, secondly, the possibility of having both pages opened at the same time, and third, browsing the paper with your own fingers. The possibility of managing the dual action of viewing and reading at your own pace and being able to stop it at any time strengthens the materiality of the print. The black and white photo traces you back to the paper, not to the digital, to the memory of the photo manually taken and printed, and though the digital imitates the paper, it is not the paper. For reasons that are aligned with economy and availability, the digital keeps on growing, but there is something sensorial in line with our sense of feeling the touch, which will always remain. According to Wolf (2009: 24), "It is the manipulation of the physical properties of the printed codex as an object that makes the reader aware of the novel's dependence on the medium of print". This fictional novel is double-coded in a manner characteristic of most meta-referential works and devices. On the one hand, it reminds the reader that he/she is dealing with a reality mediated via print at the same time that it is meant to contribute to the reader's reconstruction and understanding of this mediated reality. In a similar vein, Hayles says that:

Materiality is an emergent property which depends on how the work mobilises its resources as a physical artefact as well as on the user's interactions with the work and the interpretive strategies she develops – strategies that include physical manipulations as well as conceptual frameworks. In the broadest sense, materiality emerges from a dynamic interplay and crafts its physicality to create meaning. (Hayles 2002: 33)

Admittedly, most multimodal novels can be presented in other formats; however,

the novel discussed here demonstrates that the codex format can constitute an inextricable (unable to be separated) element of the novel's meaning.

8. Concluding remarks

In agreement with Christine Ljungberg (2006: 250), "When actual photographs occur within the narrative, the introduction of a different semiotic system both supports and disturbs the reading process. Since photography appears to operate on a different plane than the verbal narrative, it would seem to offer life writing a unique way of authentication from a different perspective".

This perspective is the one which not only acts as a means to validate the narration but also challenges the reader to make sense of the relationships that draw verbal and non-verbal modes together. In this multimodal novel, Orphan photographs are visual, textual modes that have become an integral part of the story, indissolubly interwoven into the fictional discourse. *MPH* is, then, the result of the semiotic reciprocity between written verbal and non-verbal modes, which are fully integrated into the narrative discourse and constitute an integral part of the reader's construction of the story: "In the case of the multimodal novel, the reader is engaged in constructing a holistic mental model of the textual world in which she/he incorporates data from different semiotic sources and modes" (Hallet 2009: 150). Accordingly, the reader's active participation in the construction of meaning between modes signals the emergence of a type of reading fashion which departs from the traditional reader's role that requires making meaning solely from the words on a page. This fact, in turn, points to the need to promote mode literacy as an invitation to unravel meaning relationships between what is written and what is viewed.

As regards orphan photos, this fictional novel proves that found photographs are lost memories which give way to new memories via the re-contextualisation that takes place when photos are inserted in a medium different from the one which once gave birth to them. The main characteristic of orphan photographs is that "we no longer have access to their owners or producers, the subjects featured in them, or the families of those who witnessed or might authenticate their circumstances" (Camp 2012: 87). So, abandonment, displacement and forgetfulness give way to reappropriation, recontextualisation and the consequent assignation of new meanings. Non-verbal or non-narrative elements in novels have often been simply overlooked and left unconsidered in literary criticism, yet, in the case of orphan photos in this novel, it becomes relevant to observe how the condition of orphan changes is adopted.

As far as analogue photography is concerned, once were analogue photographs which have been digitised and then turned into paper again strengthen the validity of the analogue as conduits of memory, which brings back the reassurance of the paper medium and its documentary value. According to Judy Attfield (2000: 3), "thinking materially about photography encompasses processes of intention, making, distributing, consuming, using, discarding and recycling". All these processes mark, even in the digital age, when the materiality of many images evaporates, the desire for the material object remains, as this fiction novel demonstrates because as indicators of materialities, they lead the reader to value the medium of the literary fictional works as a physical container of evidence that something happened.

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Biografie delle autrici e degli autori

Michele Amaglio

Fotografo e curatore. Laureato in Photography presso The University of Brighton (2015) e in Semiotica presso l'Università di Bologna, accompagna la sua pratica artistica alla pratica di curatore di progetti incentrati sulla fotografia e le arti visive. Nel 2016 fonda l'organizzazione Ardesia Projects dedita a progetti curatoriali sulla fotografia contemporanea in Italia all'estero.

Massimo Roberto Beato

Dottore di ricerca in Philosophy, Science, Cognition, and Semiotics presso l'Università di Bologna, sotto la supervisione di Maria Pia Pozzato e Claudio Paolucci, si occupa di sociosemiotica del teatro, gestualità e corporeità, semiotica e teoria dell'immagine, semiotica dello spazio, semiotica dell'esperienza, narrazioni sincretiche, narrazioni seriali, metodologia semiotica di analisi testuale, teorie dell'enunciazione e della soggettività, media immersivi e tecnologie enattive, forme e modelli di scrittura. Ha pubblicato articoli sulle riviste scientifiche «ElC», «Carte Semiotiche», «Mimesis Journal», «Topoi» e «Annali di studi religiosi». Attualmente, è docente a contratto di Storia del teatro e dello spettacolo (L-ART/05) presso l'Università degli Studi della Tuscia, dove tiene anche un laboratorio di Scrittura creativa.

Emanuele Crescimanno

Professore di Estetica presso l'Università degli Studi di Palermo; svolge la propria attività didattica nei corsi di studio in Scienze della comunicazione; compone il Collegio dei docenti del Dottorato di ricerca in Cultura visuale. Si occupa delle intersezioni tra estetica e cultura visuale, con particolare attenzione alla fotografia, ai media digitali e alle nuove forme di esperienza estetica.

Maria Del Pilar Martínez

has been a teacher educator for more than forty years in Argentina. She holds a postgraduate

degree in EFL, a postgraduate degree in technology and a M.A. degree in Anglo American literature (UNRC). She was head of department and vice principal of the English Teacher Trainer College in Pergamino. She co-coordinated the CPD EFL program of the Ministry of Education in the Buenos Aires province. She has written courses, delivered presentations and published on EFL and Literary criticism. At present she lectures on Literature and Cultural Studies at UTN San Nicolás, B.A, facilitates workshops for advanced students of the Teacher training college and coordinates literary workshops. Her main research interests are CPD and multimodal literature.

Joan Fontcuberta

È artista, insegnante, critico, storico della fotografia e curatore di mostre. Ha scritto una dozzina di libri, tra cui *El Beso de Judas. Fotografía y verdad* (1997), *Ciencia y fricción* (1998), *La (foto)cámara de Pandora, o La Furia de las imágenes (notas sobre la Postfotografía)* (2016). Le sue opere sono state collezionate ed esposte in musei d'arte e di scienza di tutto il mondo, dal MoMA di New York al Science Museum di Londra. Nel 2013 ha ricevuto il premio internazionale Hasselblad.

Valentina Manchia

Insegna presso la Scuola del Design del Politecnico di Milano, nel corso di laurea magistrale in Design della Comunicazione, e presso l'Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, oltre che a ISIA Urbino, ISIA Faenza e IAAD Torino. Dottore di ricerca in Semiotica e Comunicazione simbolica presso l'Università di Siena, collabora con il Centro Interateneo di Ricerca CROSS (Centro di Ricerca Omar Calabrese di Semiotica e Scienze dell'immagine) ed è redattrice delle riviste «Carte Semiotiche» e «Ocula».

Tra i suoi interessi di ricerca le intersezioni tra verbale e visivo e tra rappresentazione e visualizzazione, con particolare attenzione per

la comunicazione visiva, la *data visualization* e il panorama visuale contemporaneo.

Dario Mangano

È professore ordinario di Semiotica all'Università di Palermo dove insegna Semiotica del brand e tiene un Laboratorio di teoria e tecniche del linguaggio audiovisivo nei corsi di Laurea in Scienze della Comunicazione. Nella stessa università dirige inoltre il Laboratorio di Comunicazione del Dipartimento Culture e Società. È presidente dell'Associazione Italiana Studi Semiotici (AISS). I suoi interessi di ricerca sono rivolti al design, alla pubblicità, alla fotografia e alla gastronomia. Ha pubblicato diversi libri e articoli fra cui *Ikea e altre semiosfere* (Mimesis, 2019), *Che cos'è la semiotica della fotografia* (Carocci, 2018) *Che cos'è il food design* (Carocci, 2014), *Semiotica e design* (Carocci, 2008).

Valentina Mignano

Dottore di ricerca in Studi culturali, rappresentazioni e performance, è ricercatrice (tip. A) presso il dipartimento Culture e Società dell'Università di Palermo, dove insegna Storia della fotografia, Storia del cinema, Studi Culturali e Visual Design. I suoi principali ambiti di ricerca sono: cultura visuale, mediologia, studi sulla fotografia digitale e sulla proliferazione dell'immagine. Tra le sue pubblicazioni: *Schermi. Immagini, corpi, condivisioni* (Palermo University Press 2019); *Biopolitik am Bildschirm*, in V. Borsò e M. Cometa (a cura di) *Die Kunst, das Leben zu Bewirtschaften* (Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2013, pp. 251- 269). È membro della redazione del sito www.studiculturali.it: il portale italiano degli studi culturali, e della rivista *Visual Culture Studies* (VCS).

Doriane Molay

Graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris, Doriane Molay is currently completing a thesis at the EHESS, where she is a member of the CESPra. Her research, which focuses on the practice of the photographic album from a social aesthetics perspective, examines the narration of the self and its impact on the constitution of the subject: what can produce in real life the production of aesthetic forms, and what does everyday life provoke in the production of such aesthetic systems? In these perspectives, she has worked for a few months at the Warburg Institute and the Houghton Library (Harvard University). At the

same time, Doriane Molay is co-director of the project *Fiction and the Ethical Turn* supported by the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, in which she is mainly interested in the works of the Bloomsbury Group, and is presently a laureate of the research programme of the Institut pour la Photographie des Hauts-de-France, through which she is beginning an essay on the Stephen sisters, Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. She has presented her studies at various international conferences in France, The United Kingdom and Germany, as well as in Italy and Portugal, and she has published in journals and collective books on sociology, image theory and literature. Also, she frequently translates scientific articles from Italian and English into French.

Miriam Rejas Del Pino

È dottoranda in Storia dell'Arte presso l'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, e nel 2023 realizza un soggiorno di visiting all'EHESS di Parigi. Rejas ha lavorato come curatrice e archivistica dell'Archivio di Laura de Santillana dal 2021 al 2022, e forma parte del team curatoriale della mostra "Laura de Santillana: Oltre la Materia" alle Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia (2023). Nel 2019 Rejas si è laureata in Arti Visive allo IUAV, e ottiene il riconoscimento di "Best Visual Arts Dissertation Award". Al termine del Master frequenta CAMPO presso la Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo e nel 2020 co-fonda TBD Ultramagazine, un progetto editoriale che ha già pubblicato cinque volumi. Rejas ha scritto saggi in cataloghi e riviste scientifiche ed è membro del CROSS Centro di Ricerca e del LABIM.

Elisa Sanzeri

Laureata Magistrale in Semiotica (Università di Bologna), svolge attualmente il Dottorato di Ricerca in Semiotica all'Università degli Studi di Palermo con un progetto incentrato sullo spazio domestico. I suoi interessi di ricerca ruotano intorno alla problematica delle soglie e alla definizione delle relazioni tra casa e città.