



Photographic agency and the mediations of precarity

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This research paper explores the potential role of documentary photography in developing a reflexive space through which narratives of precarity and the modern ruins can be open for public debate. Drawing on a case study that begins from the series Post Industrial Stories of photojournalist Ioana Cîrlig that surveys the mining industry and the effects of the transition from Communism to a market economy in mono-industrial areas of Romania, I will start a conversation about the particular ways in which form and rhetoric operate in such representations. At the same time, I try to identify the appropriate methodologies through which such photographs are analyzed as a vital resource for debating crucial problems of society. One way of doing this is by looking in a serious manner at what constitutes visual tropes and evaluate how they address contemporary issues.

By pointing at their aesthetic strategies these images can become socio-critical tools in warning and telling about what otherwise might pass unnoticed. Another avenue will be to engage with Ariella Azoulay's argument regarding the civil contract of photography, which is that the photographic image is organized as an encounter between people, and determine what type of thoughts and emotions are generated on the spectator's part. My argument is

that the mediated distance which sometimes alienates the viewer can be seen differently and that a moral response to a photograph is possible if we reevaluate the idea that photography can only foster unstable emotions. In the end, the question is how can landscape photography act as an agent of entering in a dialectics of seeing society? What does it mean when we look at this type of images? What is the relation between these images and the spectator? What is photography telling differently and how does it contribute to the visual construction of the social field, which brings us to WJT Mitchell and the question What does photography do?

KEYWORDS

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