

PhotoResearcher

» I am shocked. « *

* Peter Turner on new photobooks
Creative Camera 1/1989

The Reception
of Photobooks

Guest Editors

MARKUS & CHRISTOPH SCHADEN

6—29

MARIKO TAKEUCHI
Ken Domon: Hiroshima
(1958)

30—47

SOPHIE SCHÄFER
Robert Frank: The
Americans (1959)

48—73

MARKUS SCHADEN
Michael Schmidt:
Waffenruhe (1987)

74—87

FRITS GIERSTBERG
Hans Aarsman: Hollandse
Taferelen (1989)

88—107

LUIS WEINSTEIN
Paz Errázuriz: Adam's
Apple (1990)

108—133

CHRISTOPH SCHADEN
Gilles Peress: The Silence
(1995)

134—165

MORITZ NEUMÜLLER
Gian Butturini: London by
Gian Butturini (1969/2017)

Including conversations with
JORGE LUIS ÁLVAREZ PUPO
and AZU NWAGBOGU

Which pictures do I just glance at, which pictures are without consequence, which pictures do I look at time and time again, which pictures do I need to be able to live? Which pictures scream at me, and in which pictures does only the author scream? Which pictures have left their mark on me, which pictures can I not escape from? What does that all have to do with me?

Wilhelm Schürmann, 1983¹

A German-language specialist publication with the title of *Gedruckt und erblättert* (*Printed and leafed through*) that focused on *The Photobook as a Medium of Aesthetic Articulation since the 1940s* was issued in 2016 (___ fig. 1). The anthology brought together a desideratum of 16 contributions that approached the object of investigation in a multi-perspectival fashion. The five editors already stressed the fact that the photobook is a virulent field of research in the history of art in their introduction: “This publication stands at the beginning of prospering photobook research and aims at making a contribution to a reappraisal of a pioneering photographic work and representation format.”² Programmatically, Steffen Siegel provided a multipart catalogue of measures that would characterise future photobook research in his introductory text to the volume.³ The photo historian had already given a talk on this matter at the ESHPh symposium *Seiten, Blicke* (*Pages, Views*) held at the MUSA in Vienna on 10 June 2016 (___ fig. 2). In this 35th number of the *PhotoResearcher*, we wish to add an additional aspect that has been largely ignored by the scientific side, and that we feel to be extremely substantial, to Siegel’s catalogue: that of the reception.

Our premise is based on the recognition that, to a large extent, the history of photography can be told as a history of reception. This is because only when photographic reproductions have found resonance in exhibitions and publications, and subsequently been subjected to a discursive discussion, can they become rel-

Gedruckt und erblättert
Das Fotobuch als Medium
ästhetischer Artikulation seit
den 1940er Jahren



fig. 1

Burcu Dogramaci et al., *Gedruckt und erblättert. Das Fotobuch als Medium künstlerischer Artikulation seit den 1940er Jahren*, Cologne 2016, cover.

1 ___ Wilhelm Schürmann, 'Was hat das alles mit mir zu tun?', in: *Einsichten-Aussichten. Vier Aspekte subjektiver Dokumentar fotografie*, exh. cat. Städtische Galerie Regensburg, Regensburg 1983, 8.

2 ___ Burcu Dogramaci, Désirée Dütter, Stefanie Dufhues, Maria Schindelegger, Anna Volz (eds.), 'Das Fotobuch als Medium künstlerischer Artikulation: zur

Einleitung', in: *Gedruckt und erblättert. Das Fotobuch als Medium ästhetischer Artikulation seit den 1940er Jahren*, Schriftenreihe des Studienentrums zur Moderne – Bibliothek Herzog Franz von Bayern am Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, 3, Cologne 2016, 15.

3 ___ Steffen Siegel, 'Drucksache. Vorbemerkungen zu einer künftigen Fotobuch-Forschung', in: Dogramaci 2016 (reference 2), 22–33.



fig. 2
PAGES, VIEWS. Current Research on History and Trends of PHOTO|BOOK|ALBUM, Conference of the European Society for the History of Photography (ESHP), in cooperation with the German Photographic Association (DGPh), MUSA, Vienna 10 June 2016. © Friedrich Schmidt, Vienna.

evant and invested with meaning for the public. And here – in addition to the means of application – it is mainly the forums of criticism that, as intermediary instances, generate discourses of this kind. In no way have photobooks been excluded from these receptive mechanisms, which were shaped by the analogue for so long.

The questions associated with a reception-based focus on photobooks are obvious. What was the basis when volumes with critical claims were inspected? Which specific media, content and forms did the reviewer focus on, and which were left out? To what extent were social discussions and discourses sparked or developed further? Which criteria or arguments were used or assumed for the evaluation or assessment? And last but not least: To which extent did the receptive ductus itself become an object of reflective perception of the photobook? The following contributions concern themselves with a catalogue of questions of this kind. Seven studies investigate a wide range of discourses and debates in a case-specific manner. Our authors consciously chose milestones from the history of photobooks whose influence on social conditions cannot be denied. However, the essays take different methodological approaches. The studies reveal that a certain moment of tension can be revealed precisely at the intersection of productive prescription and receptive interpretation that is well worth investigating. In conformance with Christoph Benjamin Schulz, photobooks articulate an “explicit awareness that the book not only subjects its content to the process of preparation and editing related to its publication, but also makes an entirely specific form of reception, which significantly influences the way in which the reader can appropriate its content, possible.”⁴

4 — Christoph Benjamin Schulz, *Poetiken des Blätterns, Literatur – Wissen – Poetik*, vol. 4, Monika Schmitz Means (ed.), Hildesheim, Zurich, New York 2015, 288.

Deep wounds

In the first text, *Mariko Takeuchi* provides a profound analysis of the photobook *Hiroshima* by Ken Domon from the year 1958. The volume uncompromisingly visualises the late consequences of the devastating atomic bombing on 6 August 1945 that destroyed 80 per cent of the city and immediately robbed 80,000 people of their lives. Taking great care, Takeuchi uncovers the powerful conception of the book that follows the humane impulse of the photographer to overcome the collective trauma of war through an empathic *act of seeing*. Ken Domon's *Hiroshima* can be seen as a reminder and possibly also as the writing on the wall. In its function as a memorial, the book embodies a central category of photobook culture after 1945. An empathically focussed type of reception of pity is indelibly inscribed in it.

Robert Frank's *The Americans* has long been considered one of photography's great books of the century. The volume, which was first published in French by Robert Delpire in 1958, received its unmistakable formulation from the New York publishing house Grove Press one year later. Based on the exemplary initiatives produced by Frank's classic on the 50th anniversary of its publication, *Sophie Schäfer* poses the question of whether the scientific perspective on *The Americans* has actually been fully exhausted. The designer not only refers to various aspects of the physical appearance of the book that have, so far, only received marginal attention, but – for the first time – focuses on the factor of the virality from the digital perspective. The radius of the reception of Frank's work is reflected in the numerous editions and print runs of the volume that have been in circulation globally for almost 70 years. The author reconstructs the matrix of the publication and distribution processes of *The Americans* on a foil of a map of the world to provide a platform for clarifying the mythologisation of the work.

Markus Schaden also processes a topographical approach in his analysis of the reception of *Waffenruhe* a disparaging paperback book by Michael Schmidt that was published in 1987. Two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, this book by the belligerent author-photographer from the Kreuzberg district of Berlin captured the doomsday mood of the divided metropolis that was his hometown. His radically subjective visual language emphatically irritated the contemporaries. An evaluation of the reviews of the book in the city, nation, and internationally proves that a trans-Atlantic distance was necessary to be able to fully appreciate the uncompromising new approach taken by *Waffenruhe*.

Neglect, minorities, taboos

Hans Aarsman's landscape-format photobook *Hollandse Taferelen*, which was published in 1989, reveals a completely different form of radicality. When *Frits Gierstberg* sifted through the reactions in the Dutch daily press, his diagnosis was – in retrospect

– one of universally friendly helplessness. Reflexively, the reviews always referred to the photographer's personal disposition. Naturally, by doing so, they overlooked how Aarsman's subtle colour photographs were able to unite tendencies of American new-color photography with a fine sense of irony and pose the caustic question of the national identity in a deliberately restrained manner. In this respect, as far as the Netherlands is concerned, *Hollandse Taferelen*, represents a failure on the part of the critics.

Sometimes, it takes decades for the enormous force of a photobook to be fully felt. This applies to *Adam's Apple*, a celebrated long-term documentary work made by the Chilean photographer Paz Errázuriz that was published in book form in 1990 and illustrates the lives of male sex workers and transvestites in the brothels of Santiago and Talca during the Pinochet dictatorship. As a result of the Corona pandemic, *Luis Weinstein* did not have access to the libraries of the country. For that reason, he used the method of 'oral history' in his search for traces to interview witnesses of the period who had worked on the realisation of the photobook on Zoom. Their impressive narratives in *Adam's Apple* also talk about resistance and struggles and, in the aftermath, reveal how greatly the values and perceptions of books and images can change over time.

This definitely also applies to *The Silence*, a photobook by the French MAGNUM photographer Gilles Peress, that reached the public in 1995 and made the western world open its eyes to a political taboo theme in an almost unbearable manner: the genocide that had taken place in Rwanda in 1994. *Christoph Schaden* is able to show how – in the reviews in the German cultural environment – a new discourse over the dilemma of seeing and speaking developed out of a moment of shock. For the very first time in Germany, the focus of criticism was transferred from photographic images, over the conception, to the singular mediality of the book itself.

Finally, in the last contribution, *Moritz Neumüller* tackles one of the cases of our digitally-influenced present that set off a mighty tremor in the international cultural world. Here, a photobook acted as the trigger for an escalation that took place over the social media. We are speaking about *London by Gian Butturini*, a highly-charged photobook by the Brescian photographer and designer, first published in 1969. Some five years ago, Marin Parr proposed a reprint of the book, which had long been out of print. In late May 2019, the renowned British photographer and photobook collector suddenly saw himself confronted with an accusation of perpetuating racist tropes when the black student Mercedes Baptiste Halliday posted a tweet drawing attention to a combination of motifs on a double-page spread in the book that she felt were offensive and hurtful. The controversy that ensued in the social media was not without consequences. In the end, *London by Gian Butturini* was taken off the market by the Italian

Damiani publishing house in the summer of 2020, and Parr resigned as Director of the Bristol Photo Festival. The debate is still smouldering.

This affair marked a paradigm shift in the area of photo, media, and image research. For the first time in the history of photography, social-media instruments massively intervened in the reception of a photobook. Based on a profound analysis of the sources, and taking both the original 1969 edition, as well as the reprint, of *London by Gian Butturini* into consideration, Neumüller reconstructs the various stages of the digitally influenced, debate in his essay. In addition to written sources, he draws on numerous statements made by those involved and experts who he interviewed – by telephone, email, and zoom – over the past months. Although, unfortunately all of the people involved in the debate did not make themselves available, the reactions reflect an extremely multifaceted, heterogenic spectrum of perceptions and positions. Also in connection with how the photobook should be dealt with in future. The debate definitely needs to be continued.

The background and timing of this conflict are in no way coincidental. The problem of smouldering racism has long made its way into the consciousness of the cultural sector. Together with the editors of this issue of the *PhotoResearcher*, Moritz Neumüller decided to include two extensive interviews – one with the Cuban photographer Jorge Luis Álvarez Pupo who lives in Antwerp, and the other with the Nigerian curator Azu Nwagbogu – in his analysis. Their comments make it clear that structural and personal changes, in the sense of more diversity, are also necessary in the international photo scene. And, in connection with this, the necessity of coming closer together and listening to each other.

Taken as a whole, the case studies in this issue of *PhotoResearcher* impressively document that the receptive factor is what actually represents the dynamic instance of our photobook culture. This respect as well would make it worthwhile to increasingly focus on the reception of photobooks in future research. Especially, when we hear “I am shocked” once again.

Markus and Christoph Schaden, Ulla Fischer-Westhauser, Uwe Schögl
Vienna, April 2021

LONDON BY
GIAN BUTTURINI

“A Stone Thrown at My Head”. *London by Gian Butturini* – A Reception History, 1969–2021

Moritz Neumüller

Saturated with images, we now live in a world where the power of an image is so self-evident, so common, that it is easily dismissed.

Sarah Lewis¹

At first, this photobook told a success story: In June 1969, a 34 year old designer from a small town in northern Italy travelled to London to install a display for a client at an international trade show on plastics, at the Olympia Exhibition Centre. Using his Nikon F, he then spent a month photographing in the metropolis. In the course of those few weeks, he underwent a deep personal transformation and returned home with a book project under his arm: *London by Gian Butturini* (— fig. 1). Self-published in the fall of 1969, it won several prizes and soon became a cult book, recognized for its rough and provocative style, and its highly political content. Rediscovered by British photographer and book collector Martin Parr nearly 50 years later, it was included in photobook anthologies and exhibitions and then reissued by Italian publishers Damiani in 2017 (— fig. 2, page 134). The reprint contains several minor modifications to the original, most notably an introduction text by Martin Parr, whose name also appears on the cover and spine.

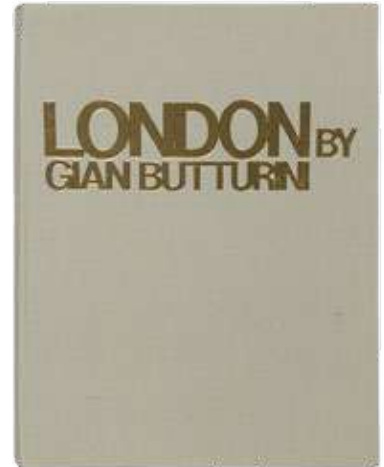


fig. 1
Gian Butturini, *London by Gian Butturini*, (self-published in Brescia, printed in) Verona 1969, 104 pages, 34.5 × 28 cm, hardcover, full grey linen and embossed golden letters.

fig. 2
Gian Butturini, *London by Gian Butturini*, reprint, Bologna 2017, 104 pages, 31 × 25.5 cm, hardcover.

A second narrative tells another story: that of a protest situated in our digitally shaped media landscape, followed by tangible, real-word consequences: In May 2019, a “campaign against [Parr’s] involvement in editing of Gian Butturini’s *London book*”² was started from a Twitter account called Less Than Human Debate. In a now famous post from @LTHdebate, Mercedes Baptiste Halliday, a young woman from Clapham, called on her followers “to confront such vile #racism within #BritishPhotography.”³ The accompanying photograph features a double-page from the 2017 reprint of Butturini’s book, juxtaposing the image of a black woman with that of a gorilla behind bars.

1 — Sarah Lewis, ‘Vision & Justice’, *Aperture* 223, Summer 2016, 13.

2 — <<https://twitter.com/LTHdebate/status/1283831377335660544>>, published 16 July 2020 (03.03.2021).

3 — <<https://twitter.com/LTHdebate/status/1133092064323952644>>, published 27 May 2019 (03.03.2021).

Initial reactions on social media ranged from shock and anger to critical interest, and the desire to know more about the editing decisions that had led to this controversial pairing. As the answers to these questions were not supplied by the publisher, Butturini's heirs or Martin Parr himself, possible explanations and the question of responsibility were openly disputed by a group of users on the network. A number of British photography blogs also reported on the case during the summer of 2019.⁴ In an apology tweeted six months after the beginning of the protest, and in reaction to a critical post by Jennie Ricketts, Martin Parr clarified that he had merely supplied an introduction to a facsimile edition. "Of course, I should have picked up on the spread, but regretfully did not. I fully acknowledge the highlighted spread is racist & am sorry for [any] offence caused."⁵ However, the debate was kept alive mainly on three Twitter accounts and gained momentum during and after the Covid-19 lockdown in spring 2020, and the toppling of the Colston statue in Bristol, on 7 June 2020. In July, at the height of what had become a notorious social media storm, Parr wrote an email to Baptiste Halliday, to "personally apologise" to her, but again insisting that he was not the editor of *London*. She replied with an email in which she argued that, for her, it was fair to assume that he was indeed responsible for the publication. She added four requests, saying they would go a long way to counteracting the damage that had been done:

- “1. You publicly and transparently apologise for the active role you have had in the publication of this book.
2. You personally request that the author and publisher of this book discontinue any reprinting and distribution of the book.
3. That any royalties, fees and derivatives from the publication of this book be donated or redistributed to a charity or a campaign to support young black people and people of colour.
4. Request (Parr's assistant) Louis Little to personally apologise to me taking accountability for his abusive and dismissive rhetoric.”⁶

Parr promptly complied with all four requests. However, as pressure from the media and funding partners built up over the next few days, he was also forced to resign as the Artistic Director of the first Bristol Photo Festival, an event that he himself had founded, and scheduled for March 2021.

On the day after Parr's resignation, 22 July 2020, @LTHdebate published a last email sent by Baptiste Halliday to Parr before the account fell silent. The British media quickly lost interest in the case, while on Butturini's native soil discussion heated

4____ The first two blog entries covering the protest were: Joy Celine Asto, 'Martin Parr is Under Fire for a Photo Book Reprint He Edited in 2017', <<https://www.thephoblographer.com/2019/06/03/martin-parr-is-under-fire-for-a-photo-book-reprint-he-edited-in-2017/>>, published 3 June 2019 (03. 03. 2021); and Mick Yates, 'Looking is Necessary', <<https://www.yatesweb.com/looking-is-necessary/>>,

published 4 June 2019, with updates from 21 July 2020, 10 August 2020, and 19 August 2020 (03. 03. 2021).

5____ <twitter.com/parrstudio/status/1202607249757286400>, published 5 December 2019 (03. 03. 2021).

6____ Both letters have been made public by twitter user @LTHdebate (reference 2).

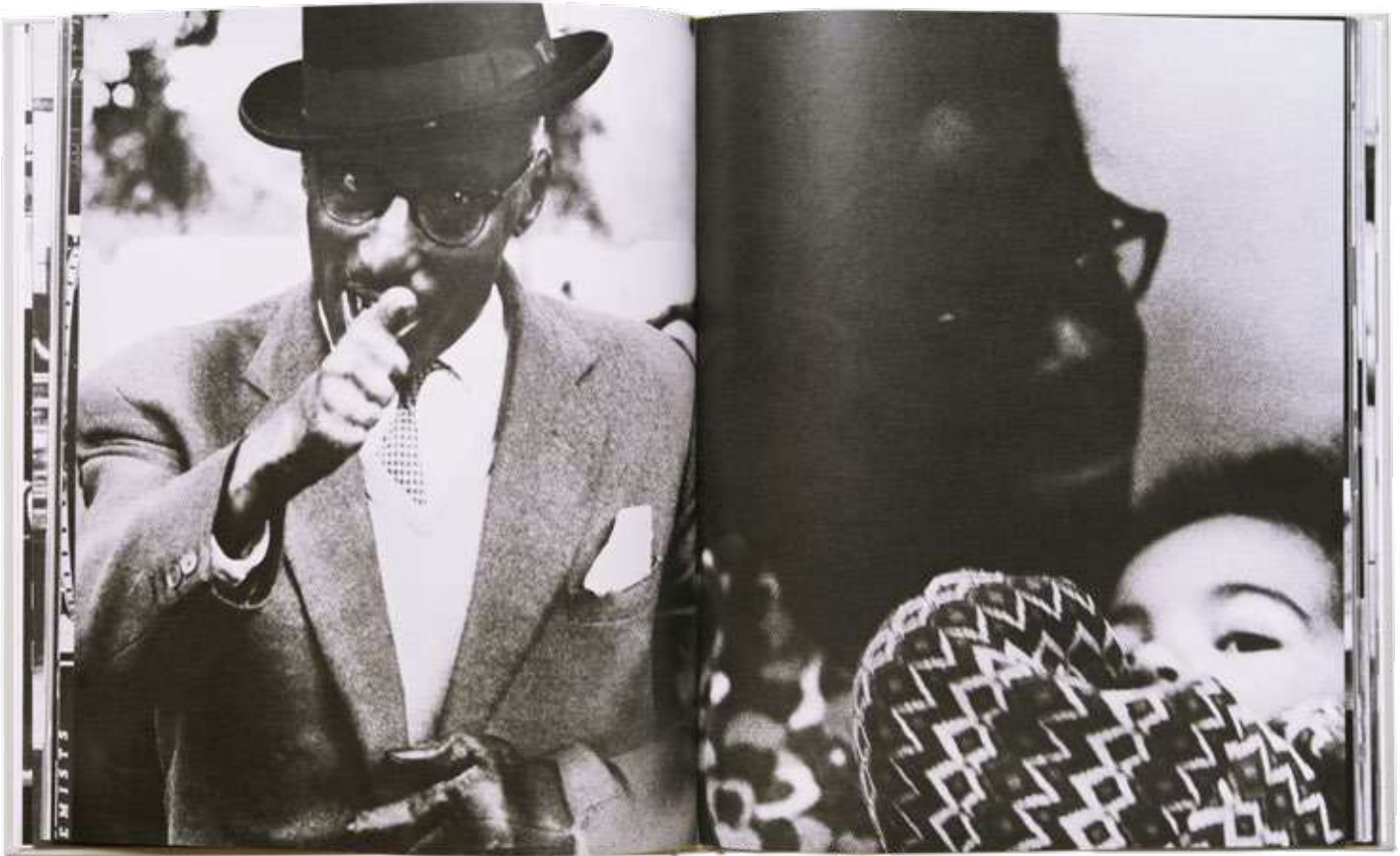


fig. 3
Gian Butturini, *London by Gian Butturini*, reprint, Bologna 2017, pages 48–49.

up. The reaction in the Italian media, from national newspapers to specialised photography blogs, was practically *unisono*: Butturini's book had been misunderstood, his name had been stained and the removal of the book was an act of censorship and an assault on artistic freedom. Consequently, the heirs of the photographer, who had passed away in 2006, recovered the remaining copies of the book (— fig. 3) and made them available through the Associazione Gian Butturini. They also co-organised an exhibition, together with several online events that ran under the title *Save the Book*. Finally, in early 2021, the association launched a new website, londonbygianbutturini.com, with the purpose of selling selected fine art prints, among them the now famous diptych of the black woman and the gorilla.

Disposition, methodology and limitations

This paper is intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of the reception of *London by Gian Butturini*, in its 1969 original and the reprint of 2017. The conversation about the book is still ongoing, rendering a full historic perspective on the story incomplete. However, I will attempt to distill the reception and discussion of the book, between late 1969 and early 2021, in an academic discourse that will enable a critical breakdown of the facts. It is hoped that this analysis will indicate possible answers to some of the most relevant research questions connected to the case.

The intention of this paper is not to explain away racism and the experiences of people of colour by intellectualizing the issues at stake. As an author in the scientific

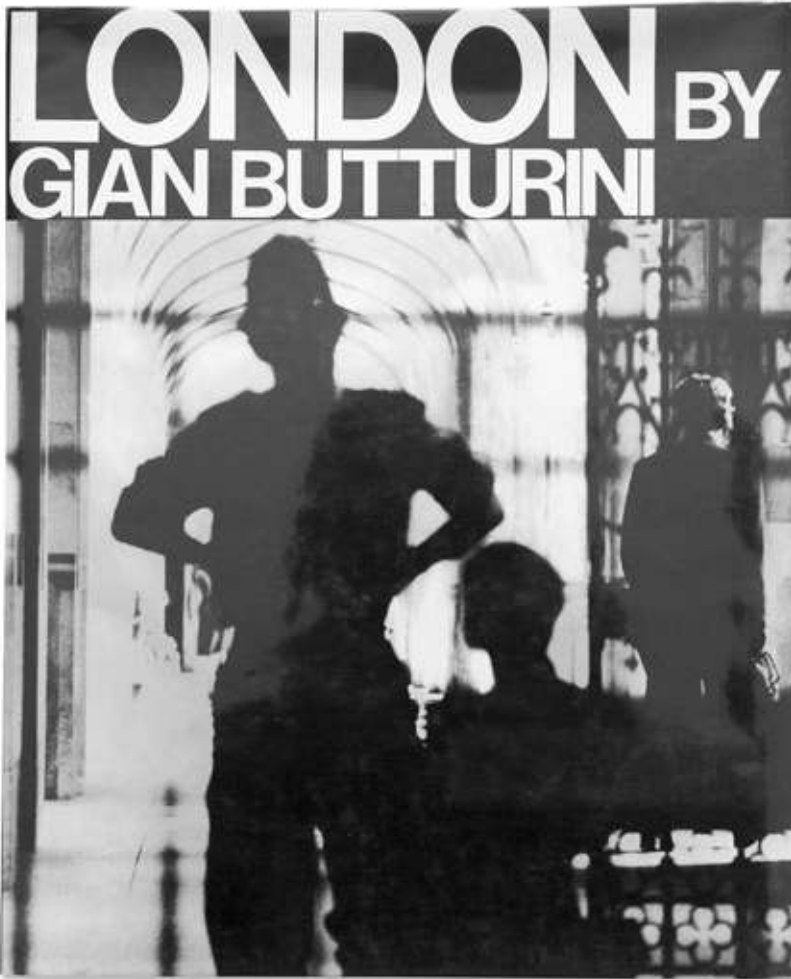


fig. 4
 Gian Butturini (1935–2006), *London by Gian Butturini*, (self-published in Brescia, printed in) Verona 1969, 1969, 104 pages (unpaginated), 34.5 × 28 cm, hardcover, thread-sewn, flat spine, with full grey linen and embossed golden letters, illustrated dust jacket. 78 b&w photographs, Italian texts by Luciano Mondini and Gian Butturini. Quote by Robert Capa printed on the front free endpaper, in Italian; fragment of the poem 'Europe! Europe!' by Allen Ginsberg (1958), in English. Printed and distributed by Editrice SAF, Verona, in an edition of 1000.

context of such a publication, I want firstly to disclose any bias or personal involvement that could have distorted my conclusions. Even though many of my past curatorial and research projects have revolved around issues such as the African diaspora, migration, cultural translation and the deconstruction of photographic icons, I am fully aware of my own delicate position in a system that is still dominated by male, white, Western discourses and power relations.⁷ In addition, I have, in the past, collaborated with some of the main protagonists in this case, and was involved in organising an exhibition in which the (original) book was displayed, and seen by a large audience.

The research findings have been set out alongside the opinions of a diverse group of interview partners, respondents who were directly or indirectly involved in the course of events and “willing to stick their head above the parapet”, as one of them put it. In alphabetical order, the interviewees were Jorge Luis Álvarez Pupo, Damion Berger,

Emilie C. Boone, Marta and Tiziano Butturini, Federica Chiochetti, Louis Little, Erich Hatala Matthes, Azu Nwagbogu, Martin and Susie Parr, Manuela Moreira, Tom Seymour, David L. Smith, and Mick Yates. To my regret, Dennis Low did not release his interview for publication and, despite several attempts on my part, Mercedes Baptiste Halliday, her father Paul Halliday and the blogger Ben Chesterton (three key players who together initiated and drove the social media campaign against the book) declined to be formally interviewed. It would certainly have been fruitful to contrast my analysis of many hundreds of their Twitter interactions with current statements from them.

The following analysis is structured in five sections: the book itself; the reception at the time of its publication (1969–1970); its rediscovery and republication (2014–2018); the social media storm and reactions until the time of writing (2019–2021); a suggestion on how to interpret the double page 78–79; and a last section dedicated to conclusions and future research. Furthermore, this analysis is complimented with two interviews: One with the Cuban photographer Jorge Luis Álvarez Pupo, about the importance to address racism; the other with the Nigerian curator Azu Nwagbogu, about our need to listen and learn from each other.

⁷ Robin J. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*, Boston 2020.

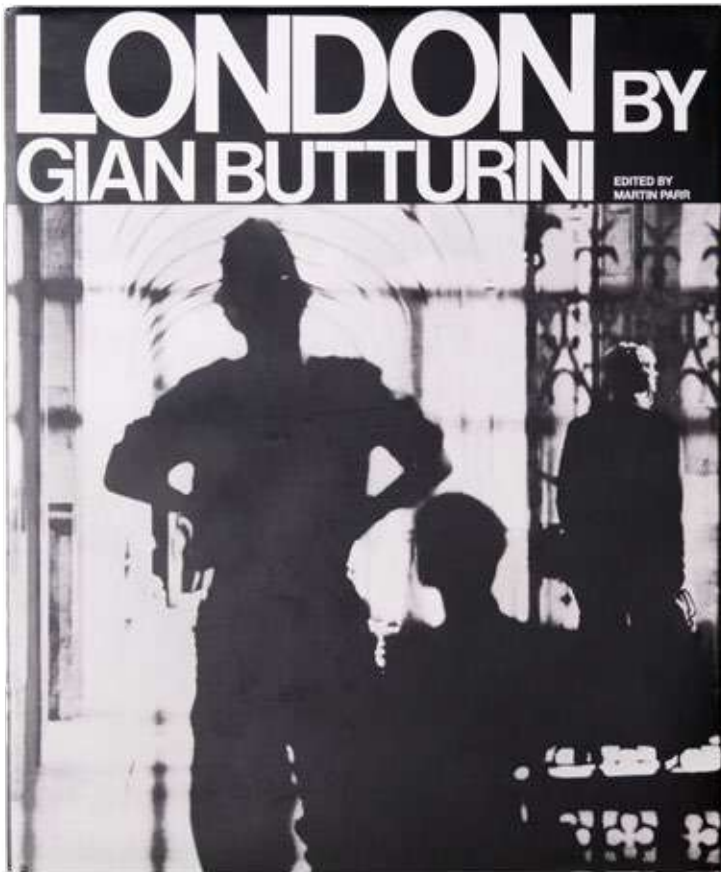


fig. 5
 Gian Butturini (1935–2006), *London by Gian Butturini*, reprint, Bologna 2017, 104 pages (unpaginated), 31 × 25.5 cm, hardcover, thread-sewn, flat spine, with full grey linen and embossed golden letters, illustrated dust jacket; “Edited by Martin Parr” written on cover and spine. 78 b&w photographs, English texts by Martin Parr, Luciano Mondini, and Gian Butturini. Fragment from the poem ‘Europe! Europe!’ by Allen Ginsberg (1958). Printed in Bologna by Grafiche Damiani – Faenza Group SpA, in an estimated edition of 3000.

Original and reprint – physis and access

It should be acknowledged that even the driest and most technical description of the book raises numerous questions and points for discussion. In fact, these ‘details’ play an important role in the reception and interpretation of the book (— figs. 4–5). Most prominently, of course, there is the question of authorship: the photographer and editor of the original book is Gian Butturini (1935–2006), and this authorship remains intact for the reprint of the book, even if it has the words EDITED BY MARTIN PARR written on the cover and the spine.⁸ If there ever was an ‘editor’ of the reprint of *London by Gian Butturini*, who took decisions such as reducing the size, or putting Parr’s name on the cover, this would have been Damiani’s Andrea Albertini, who died at the end of May 2019.⁹ Next, there is the question of the title. The book has widely been called and cited as *London*, and this is also how it is catalogued and documented in most international library systems. If we look at the Italian book reviews, announcements, and catalogues from the late 1960s and early 1970s, however,

the book is referred to as LONDON BY GIAN BUTTURINI (often, but not always, using upper case letters).¹⁰ The source that most directly reveals the intention of the author in this respect is the catalogue *Due Dimensioni* (1973), a promotion tool used by the most prominent Italian advertising agencies of the time to attract potential clients. Studio Gian Butturini lists only two ‘achievements’, one of them, “London by Gian Butturini”.¹¹ Third, despite its English title, the original book was made for the Italian market, self-published by Studio Gian Butturini and printed by Editrice SAF in Verona.¹² Fourth, the measurements: The correct size for the first edition is 34.5 × 28 cm,¹³ while the reedition measures 31 × 25.5 cm and is slightly thinner (1.5 instead of 2 cm), due to the use of a lighter paper; both alterations being intended to make the production more cost effective. The smaller format was not achieved by merely downsizing the images but by trimming off more than a centimetre from each page on the outside and bottom of the book block. The print run of the original book was 1000, the estimated edition of the reprint is 3000.¹⁴

8— It is generally agreed that this was part of the publisher’s marketing strategy (Manuela Moreira, Marta Butturini and Tiziano Butturini, personal interview, 22 November 2020).

9— <<https://www.ilrestodelcarlino.it/necro/necrologia/1123878/>>, published 24 May 2019 (03.03.2021).

10— The Italian Catalogo del Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale, shows the title as “London / by Gian Butturini”, <opac.sbn.it> (03.03.2021).

11— Studio Sironi (eds.), *Due Dimensioni*, Milan 1973, 24; confirmed by Butturini’s heirs (reference 8).

12— All texts, except for the poem by Allen Ginsberg are in Italian, and the opac.sbn.it catalogue (reference 10) defines the publisher as “Brescia: Studio Gian Butturini, 1969”. This was also confirmed by Butturini’s heirs (reference 8).

13— Email exchange with the registrars of the exhibition *Photobook Phenomenon*, October 2017.

14— Moreira and Butturini, interview (reference 8).

Perhaps the most important difference between the original and the reprint concerns the text: the reprint has a new introduction by Martin Parr, which tells the story of the rediscovery of the “politically charged book” ten years earlier; it omits the famous Robert Capa quote “It’s not easy always to stand aside ...” printed to the front free endpaper;¹⁵ and all the the texts were translated into English¹⁶ to make the book sellable on the international market.¹⁷ To accommodate Parr’s text without altering the total number of pages, the first three pages had to be slightly rearranged.¹⁸ Although they may seem like technicalities, these questions become important when it comes to citing from or referring to certain pages in the unpaginated book and the question of whether the reprint can be viewed as a ‘facsimile’, despite the alterations made by the publisher.¹⁹

A last bibliographic detail concerns the fact that, apparently, two different bellybands were produced for the book. One (probably) white bellyband was produced after the book won the ‘Premio Teleobiettivo d’Oro’ in 1970, and another yellow one was produced when it was awarded the ‘Premio EPOCA Diaframma 22 prize’, the same year. A copy of the original book with the yellow bellyband can be seen in the video of a talk by Martin Parr at Photo London in May 2018, in which he estimates that – with this special feature – the original book might fetch over £ 1000,²⁰ while the reprint of 2017 was sold on the Damiani website and in book shops around the world, for the retail price of € 40, before sales were suspended on 27 July 2020. As Butturini’s heirs were by contract entitled to the remaining copies, they started distributing them on the Association’s website, against a donation of 40 € in the fall of 2020 (raised to € 53 at the beginning of 2021). Today, both versions of *London by Gian Butturini* are part of public library holdings, in the US, Italy, Germany, the UK, Sweden, and The Netherlands, but also as far away as Australia and Singapore.

After its original (self-)publication, *London by Gian Butturini* soon became a rarity and was little known internationally, until it entered volume III of Parr/Badger’s photobook anthology,²¹ was selected by Martin Parr for major exhibitions on the medium,²² and finally resurrected in a reprint in 2017. This was then “removed and destroyed”²³ in July 2020, and resurrected for a second time in the fall of the

15___ The full quote reads “It’s not easy always to stand aside and be unable to do anything except record the suffering around one. The last day some of the best ones die. But those alive fast forget.” It was apparently written in January 1939, during the Spanish Civil War, in Barcelona. Richard Whelan, ‘The Spanish Civil War: The Catalonia Offensive’ <www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/conflict/robert-capa-spanish-civil-war-catalonia-offensive/>, published 29 January 2019 (03.03.2021). The publisher decided to omit the quote in the reprint to avoid having to pay the rights for it, Butturini, interview (reference 8).

16___ Except for the fragment of the poem *Europe! Europe!*, already in English in the first edition.

17___ Traditionally strong markets for photobooks are the US, Japan, Germany, The Netherlands, France and the UK. Moritz Neumüller (ed.). *Photobook Phenomenon*. Barcelona 2017, 4.

18___ For example, in the reprint, the dedication to “annamaria” (Butturini’s girlfriend at the time) has been moved to the title page, and the credits to the end of the book. From page 4 onward, the book is unchanged.

19___ “Reprints are usually published at a considerable time interval from the original and never by the publisher of the first edition. [...] A reprint (or

facsimile) can be expected to be as accurate a reproduction of the original as possible in terms of format, cover design and layout, and at best also in terms of printing and binding quality” (translation by the author), Thomas Wiegand, ‘Zweite Chance. Das Fotobuch im Reprint’, *Photonews*, special number 5, 2008, 10–11.

20___ <<https://youtu.be/HpdZbaATaIQ>>, published 24 May 2018 (03.03.2021).

21___ Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History*, vol. III, London 2014, 155.

22___ *Strange and Familiar: Britain as Revealed by International Photographers*, Barbican Art Gallery, Barbican Centre, 16 March–19 June 2016; *Photobook Phenomenon*, exhibition at CCCB and FotoColectania, Barcelona, 17 March–24 June 2017, and Museo San Telmo, San Sebastián, 24 March–17 June 2018.

23___ Sarah Cascone, ‘Renowned Photographer Martin Parr Has Resigned as Artistic Director of the Bristol Photo Festival After Being Accused of Racial Insensitivity’, *Artnet Blog*, <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/martin-parr-resigns-bristol-photo-racism-allegations-1896448>>, published 22 July 2020 (03.03.2021).

same year, under the motto *Save the Book*.²⁴ It can thus be said that, for fifty years, the book oscillated back and forth between invisibility and visibility; and tellingly, many of those who played a prominent part in discussing the reprint never actually saw it.²⁵

Reception history 1969–1970

The launch of *London by Gian Butturini* took place in the Tarantola bookshop in Brescia, probably on 23 November 1969; apparently it was a lively event in which political issues raised in the book were openly discussed: “In Butturini’s book there is imperial London, but without Empire, civilised London, but with blacks in shackles (even chains that cannot be seen tighten and, where they do tighten, they make people bleed).”²⁶ The publication was covered in the local press and in design magazines, in articles that underlined the main concerns in the book, for example: “The problems of racism and violence, of a subtle and intangible violence, of a society in which the monarchy and businessmen appear to young people only as a memory of an empire that no longer exists;”²⁷ “an attempt to dive into the deep, murky veins of a social context,”²⁸ or “the autobiographical London of Gian Butturini, a denunciation of discrimination and injustice”²⁹ (— figs. 6–14).

The most direct reference of interest, however, is made in the article ‘A Brescian on the Thames’, in which Butturini is described as mirroring himself “in the desperate solitude of our gorilla ancestor suffocated by the rigid net of the bars, in the heavy and palpable boredom of the black ticket seller with her soul pierced like an unusable ticket, in the immobility of waiting on the benches or along the [underground] walls.”³⁰ The fact that the author of this text links the black woman, the gorilla, and the time spent waiting (for the underground), to the “loneliness in the metropolis” and to Butturini’s own experiences suggests that, to contemporary Italian viewers, the simianisation trope might not have been instantly recognizable or a binding interpretation for this spread in the *London* book. This does not mean, of course, that other readers and the author himself were not aware of the racist trope.³¹ On the contrary,

24— The original title was actually *God Save the Book*, and consisted of events, online discussions, and the exhibition at the Spazio d’Arte Scoglio in Milan (10–23 December 2020). Butturini, interview (reference 8).

25— For example, “I must be upfront, I didn’t actually have a physical copy of Gian Butturini’s *London* book”, Tom Seymour, interview, 2 December 2020; “For the record, I have not seen either the 1969 or the 2017 facsimile edition”, Douglas Stockdale, ‘Editorial: Martin Parr and Gian Butturini’s “London”’, *Singular Images Blog*, <<https://singularimages.net/2020/07/24/editorial-martin-parr-and-gian-butturinis-london/>>, published 24 July 2020, with updates (03.03.2021); Benjamin Chesterton apparently received his copy of the reprint on 8 July 2020, after supporting the campaign against the book for more than a year, <<https://twitter.com/duckrabbitblog/status/1281214112337399809>>, published 9 July 2020 (03.03.2021).

26— “la Londra civilissima, ma coi negri in ceppi (anche catene che non si vedono stringono e dove stringono fanno sanguinare)”, from an untitled press clipping in the Butturini Archive titled “Presentato nella libreria di Silvana Tarantola il libro di immagini del grafico concittadino LONDON BY GIAN BUTTURINI”, published probably some days after the presentation, which was

summed up by saying that “the book is important, but the atmosphere created that evening is perhaps even more important.” The historic Tarantola bookshop was also chosen for the launch of the reprint of the book in October 2017.

27— “I problemi del razzismo e della violenza, di una violenza sottile ed impalpabile, di una società in cui la monarchia e i businessmen appaiono ai giovani solo come un ricordo di un impero che ormai non c’è più ...”, ‘Inchiesta. Foto Londra sconosciuta’, undated press clipping in the Butturini Archive (probably late 1969).

28— Giannetto Valzelli, “LONDON BY GIAN BUTTURINI. Scorpacciata di fototurista”, probably in: *Brescia oggi*, November 1969, Gian Butturini Archive.

29— ‘London by Gian Butturini’, *Ottagono. Rivista trimestrale di architettura arredamento industrial design*, December 1970, 117.

30— “... la biglietteria negra dall’anima bucata come un biglietto fuori uso ...”, ‘Un bresciano sul Tamigi’, undated press clipping in the Butturini Archive (probably late 1969).

31— David Livingstone Smith and Ioana Panaitiu, ‘Aping the human essence: simianization as dehumanization’, Wulf D. Hund and Charles W. Mills and Silvia Sebastiani (eds.), *Racism Analysis Yearbook*, vol. 6: Apes, Gender, Class, and Race, Berlin 2016.



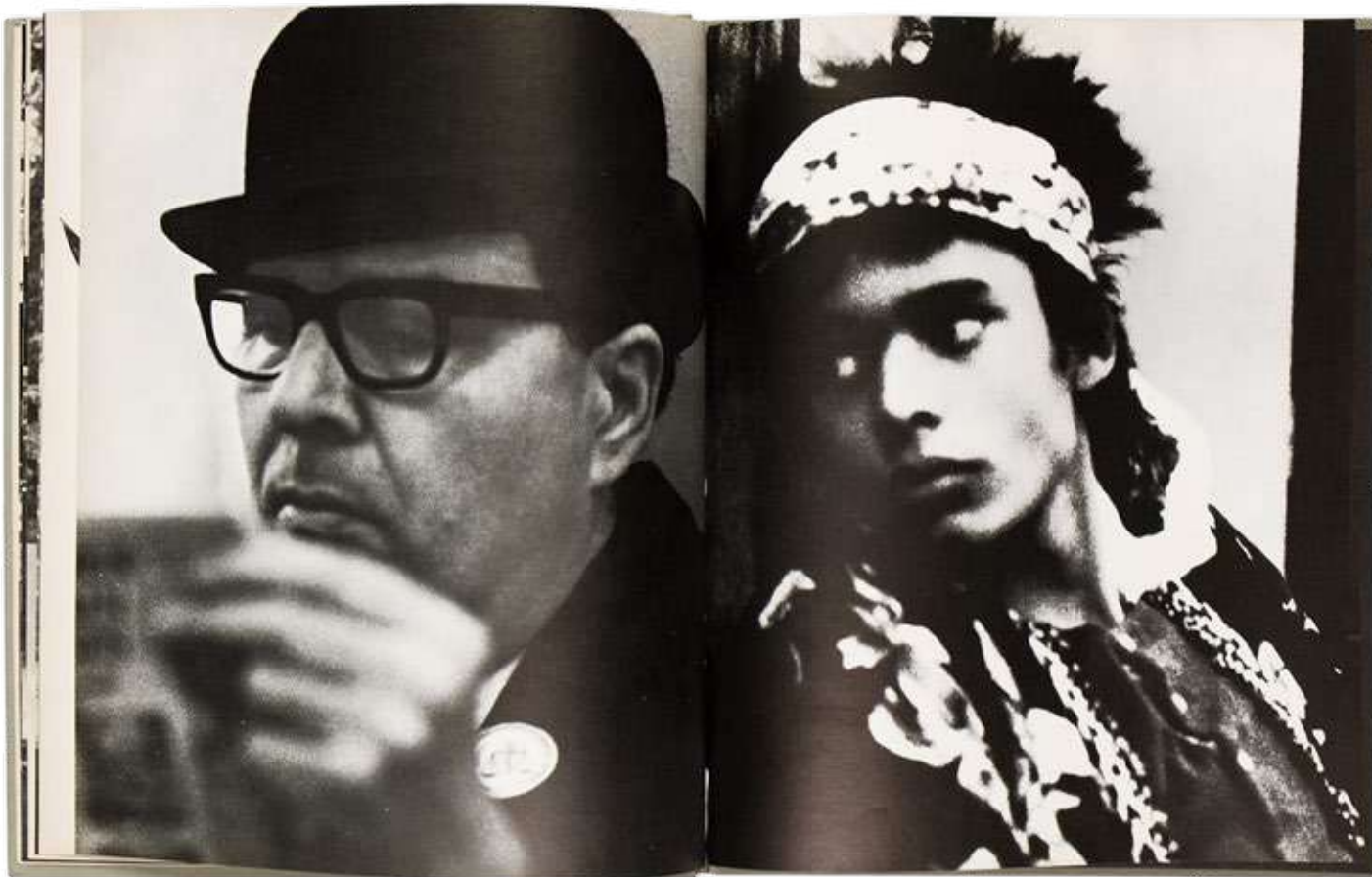
Meek crowd underground
saints perish creeps
streetwomen meet lacklove
under gaslamp and neon
no woman in house loves
husband in flower unity
nor boy loves boy soft
fire in breast politics
electricity scares downtown
radio screams for money
police light on TV screens
laughs at dim lamps in
empty rooms tanks crash
thru bombshell no dream
of man's joy is made movie
think factory pushes junk
autos tin dreams of Eros
mind eats its flesh in
geekish starvation.....

allen ginsberg

figs. 6-9
Gian Butturini, *London by Gian
Butturini*, Verona 1969, pages 10-11,
12-13, 16-17, 20-21.

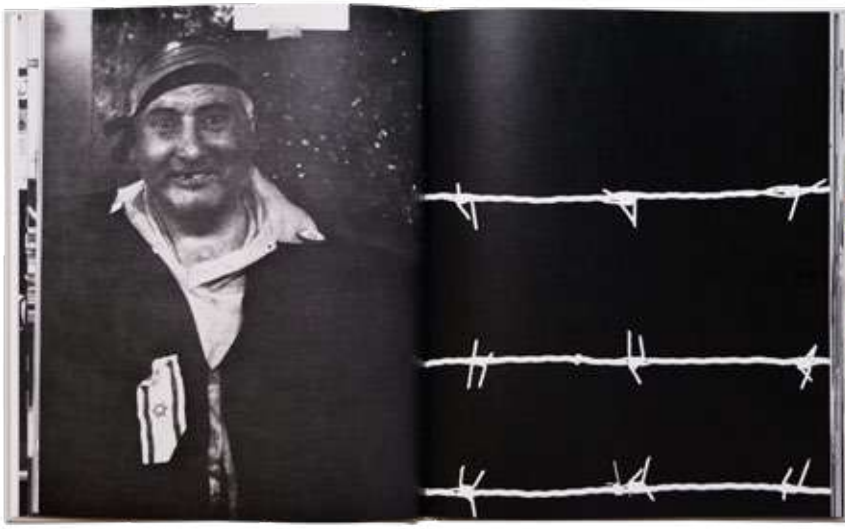








figs. 10-12
Gian Butturini, *London by Gian Butturini*, Verona 1969, pages 24-25, 26-27, 74-75.



the explicit mention of the two photographs in Butturini's introductory text is more than telling in this sense, as will be discussed below.³²

In any case, the book was recognized as a seminal work in Butturini's career as a photographer³³ and appreciated as "an elegant volume of large-format images that has a fundamental merit for a photographic book; the price is only five thousand lire, it presents itself graphically very well and is much less pretentious than other works of the genre."³⁴ "As for the content", says another article, "the result that counts most is that Butturini – a guest in London for too short a time – shows the same infatuation and frenzy as the protagonist of [Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film] 'Blow-up'.³⁵ After this warm reception of Butturini's first photobook in "his town of Brescia, where he was already well known as a designer," the publication "sold out immediately" and was not cited in international anthologies until it was discovered by Martin Parr at the beginning of the 21st century.³⁶



fig. 13

Gian Butturini, *London by Gian Butturini*, Bologna 2017, pages 38–39.

fig. 14

Gian Butturini, *London by Gian Butturini*, Bologna 2017, pages 40–41.

Reception history 2014 – April 2019

The connection with Antonioni's cult film was taken up in Gerry Badger's text about this "Italian view of London, ... something of an anti-Swinging London viewpoint" for the third volume of the *Photobook History* (2014), where *London by Gian Butturini* celebrated its comeback.³⁷ Badger notes "the classic, elegant design [of the cover] that belies some of the grimy interior shots" and the fact that "occasionally, Butturini labours the social contrast" (— fig. 15). Soon afterwards, an online review by Andreas H. Bitesnich remediates the errors in Parr/Badger concerning the title, authorship, and measurements, and includes historic and artistic reference points beyond Klein's *New York book* and *Blow Up*, such as Giulia Pirelli and Carlo Orsi's *Milano* from 1965. Generally speaking, Bitesnich seems more interested in the political dimension of the

32— According to Stefania Ragusa, a specialist in African Culture from the University of Parma, discrimination in these years was mainly aimed at Roma, Sinti and Caminanti, as well as Jews, and the inhabitants of the southern part of Italy. She notes that "many Africans who came to Italy in the 70s / 80s of the last century, often for study reasons, say they felt then the object of curiosity rather than racism. Things began to change in the late 1980s, when migration to Italy intensified", personal email exchange, on 19 January 2021.

33— *London* is only the first of dozens of photobooks in the multifaceted career of this designer, photojournalist and film director. Some of his most known photographic series and publications are dedicated to Northern Ireland, Cuba, Chile, the Saharawi people, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. His documentaries and the film *Il Mondo degli Ultimi* won several awards at international festivals

and demonstrate that, as an artist, he was fully engaged in the social discourse.

34— 'LONDON BY GIAN BUTTURINI. Premio Teleobiettivo d'Oro', undated press clipping in the Butturini Archive (probably early 1970). In fact, "only 5000 lire" is a pricing quite above normal printed matter at the time, as this amount was nearly a hundred times more than what you paid for a standard newspaper and 25 times the price of the popular magazine *L'Espresso*, which would translate to about 120 € in today's terms, compared to the 40 € of Damiani's reprint.

35— 'Inchiesta. Foto Londra sconosciuta' (reference 27).

36— Martin Parr, in his introduction to the reprint of *London by Gian Butturini*, 3.

37— Martin Parr / Gerry Badger (reference 21), 155.



fig. 15

Gian Butturini, *Untitled (Female Ticket Inspector)*, London 1969, digital scan of 35 mm negative. A cropped version of this negative was used for the book *London by Gian Butturini*, Verona 1969/Bologna 2017, page 78.

book than Parr and Badger: “In an era of lost innocence, at the height of the Vietnam war, with John Lennon returning his MBE in protest, it seems Butturini is making his own protest with his choice and sequencing of images in this book.”³⁸

Parr’s interest in the “energy of the book,”³⁹ rather than its political message is also relevant in the context of Butturini’s participation in the *Strange and Familiar* exhibition at the Barbican Centre in 2016.⁴⁰ The show’s press release mentions the Italian photographer together with a German contemporary: “The work of Gian Butturini and Frank Habicht show the euphoria of the Swinging Sixties and the anti-War movement,” and this is also how most exhibition reviews reference Butturini’s work. One exception is an article in the *Corriere della Sera*, narrating the visit of the Butturini family to the exhibition opening;⁴¹ another one is a detailed review on the *Books and Boots* blog, which describes Butturini’s “images of the late-period Swinging city, hippies, stoned parties and loud gigs [of] people actually enjoying themselves.”⁴²

38— Andreas H. Bitesnich, ‘Gian Butturini, LONDON BY GIAN BUTTURINI, 1969’, *Achtung Photography Blog*, <<https://www.achtung.photography/gian-butturini-london-by-gian-butturini-1969/>> (15. 12. 2020). The Internet Archive Wayback Machine documents this page for the first time on 13 September 2014, <web.archive.org> (03. 03. 2021).

39— Interview with Martin and Susie Parr, 17 December 2020.

40— *Strange and Familiar: Britain as Revealed by International Photographers*. Curated by Martin Parr, Barbican Art Gallery, Barbican Centre, UK 16 March–19 June 2016.

41— Pietro Gorlani, ‘Undici fotografie di Butturini sono esposte al Barbican Centre di Londra’ <https://brescia.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/16_marzo_26/gian-butturini-fotografo-bresciano-mostra-barbican-centre-londra-pietro-gorlani-4f215f0c-f34e-11e5-aa73-ceab61eba560.shtml>, published 26 March 2016 (03. 03. 2021).

42— <<https://astrofella.wordpress.com/2016/03/16/strange-and-familiar-photography-barbican/>>, published 16 March 2016 (03. 03. 2021).

»We have to talk about Racism«

Conversation between **Jorge Luis Álvarez Pupo** and **Moritz Neumüller**. Jorge Luis Álvarez Pupo works as a freelance photographer specialised in fine art, editorial and sports photography. His work has been exhibited in venues such as Paris Photo, the AIPAD fair in New York and PhotoEspaña Madrid, among others.

Moritz Neumüller: Good morning and thank you for taking your time. You have seen the discussions around the book *London* by Gian Butturini. What is your opinion about it?

Jorge Luis Álvarez Pupo: Yes, I have followed this discussion, at least in the beginning. Yet, the way how the discussion was held made me lose interest after a while. As creative people, we are part of society, and we must think about how our images will be perceived. The book spread showing the black woman and the gorilla is a perfect example to talk about these issues. When you see the *image* of the double page on the internet, it shocks you. I admit that I've been looking at it back and forth and still fail to understand Butturini's choice to put the two photographs together in order to address racism. When you see the double page in the book it may have less impact, because you see it in a context. At the same time, I also understand that Mercedes (Baptiste Halliday), when she received the book, was upset. I would dare to say that 95 % of black or colored people would be shocked.

Allow me to explain why I think this way: When I arrived in Belgium, my late girlfriend's nephew, who was then about five or six years old, had just started school. One day I said something that bothered him, and he an-

swered me: "And you are a black gorilla!". This comparison is still very present for us. Of course, it depends a lot on the context in which one has grown up and developed. Yet, if you look at the historical context, at things like the Hottentot Venus, simianisation, and related phenomena, they generate rejection, and you say "enough!", because these things are repeated over and over, as if they remained captured in the mind of society.

I have said that I understand that Mercedes felt offended by the image, even if I didn't react the same way, because when I saw it, the first thing I did was to read the context and try to understand the problem. And I have to confess that it still bothers me. We all work with clichés, it's how we see others, based on prejudices, things that we are taught in school since we are little. Of course, I also understand the other side, especially the family of the artist, and their annoyance about this campaign that has left a stain on the artist's name.

Having said that, I still wonder what Butturini meant with this juxtaposition. As a graphic designer he had a certain aesthetic, and as a storyteller, he also wanted to transmit a message. When you present something either in a book or on the gallery wall, you want to establish a dialogue with the reader or the viewer. You don't present separate images, there is a certain line of continuity that establishes a discourse. And this discourse seems to work fairly well in the book, until we reach the double page with the woman and the gorilla, because when I see it, I cannot help asking myself, what is it really about?

MN: Well ... after studying the reactions to his book in 1969 in Italy, reading his biographical notes and talking to quite a lot of people, for the last months, I have formed the opinion that what he wanted to do with this double page was to talk about systemic racism in London, from his point of view. He speaks about this both in his autobiography and in the introduction to the book, he talks about London as a wonderful, vibrant place, but he also mentions the injustice and social frictions. He went to photograph the suburbs, to talk to and photograph black people, to dignify them, as he would say. I imagine he had never seen too many people of colour before in his life. He noticed that they had the worst possible jobs and were marginalized from society. Of course, compressing this complex message in a provocative double page like that is a very risky artistic decision ...

JLAP: I would call it a brutally naïve choice, in terms of visual representation. I am aware that, in 1969, visual culture and narrative practice were different from today. As I said before, the problem is that today's viewers, the majority of the readers of this book, do not know Butturini's background and have maybe experienced things that make it justifiable to be bothered by this juxtaposition. When you make a book or an exhibition, you have to bear in mind that the doors of the museum, and the pages of the book, are open to everybody. As an image-maker you should be ready for all kinds of interpretations. And the issue we are talking about is a very sensitive one, one that has never been resolved. Racism is still very present in our society, in national contexts, just as much as on a global level. If you look at recent developments in the US, this reminds us that the end of slavery, not to mention racial segregation, took place not that long ago. It takes generations to forgive and forget.

Will the people who are offended by the way Butturini's name is being tarnished ever understand why the people who spoke out against the book spread are offended, and vice versa? I think that to some extent the problem is that we still live apart and do not mix, and that there are issues that are not discussed enough openly, not in the niche of photography, and not in general.

MN: That's also why I chose to interview you today. You are originally from Cuba, have lived in Brazil and are now based in Belgium. Is it fair to say that there is global context, but each country has its own microcosm of racism and xenophobia?

JLAP: Yes, and I think it's an ineffective strategy to attack racism in Europe through the context of the American #blacklivesmatter movement. I believe that, in terms of racism, the local perspective is just as important as the global cultural context. We cannot forget that information is globalized, and not always trustworthy, especially on social media. Issues such as this discussion have many shades of grey and you can't reduce it to black and white, right or wrong. This is the problem with extremes, people don't take their time to see where the greys are, they want to interpret quickly and give an opinion now, and then move on. They have to react as fast as possible, because if they don't, they will have no time left to react to the next thing on their Twitter timeline.

MN: Where does this pressure come from? Does it come from your friends because they expect you to have an opinion, or maybe from the social networks themselves, which are programmed to create this tension? We know that polarization makes people fight and create more traffic, which then translates into revenue for the companies. Is this about a new democracy where everyone has a say, and must have a say?

JLAP: The formula is simple, discussion generates the traffic, and traffic generates advertising. In the end, the "raison d'être" of these networks is to make money. That's the way it goes.

MN: It seems that we've all fallen into a trap and it's going to be hard for us to get out of it, because social networks have become the drug of the 21st century ... Do you think that there is something we can learn from all this?

JLAP: Yes, but it will take some time, and we will have to start listening to each other. The internet came with many advances, and since the arrival of social networks, people feel more and more that they have something to say. However, they are not interested in listening to the other. They just want to make their opinion count, but they cannot accept that other opinions exist, and that we can agree to disagree and there is no problem with that. We have to find a solution to this, and I think that the basis of everything is in education. We have to talk about racism, we have to talk about history, and we have to talk about how to show respect for the other. Part of the answer is as simple as that, to understand that there is a problem, to accept it, and to try to solve it. I saw Martin Parr's apology, but I think it is not enough. I personally believe that he should apologize in a way that people believe in, not only for damage control. He did not edit the book, he is not responsible for the content, and he is not a racist. But he is a public figure, and he has contributed an introduction to a book that has been re-published without the necessary care for context, and even if he has had the book removed, the problem is still there.

This conversation took place on 7 January 2021.

In the exhibition *Photobook Phenomenon*, which opened one year later in Barcelona, the original book was part of the section *The Collector's Vision: Martin Parr's Best Photobooks*, and showcased as number 22 of 57 books from Parr's personal collection, which was later sold to Tate Modern. The accompanying text in the catalog was a quote by Parr himself: "This self-published book combines graphics from the 1960s with Butturini's rather caustic take on London to produce this decade-defining project. It is significant that Butturini was one of the many foreign photographers who came to the UK in this decade and often produced significant work."⁴³ The show, which comprised over 500 books from all continents, included a section with reprints and second editions for the visitors to leaf through. The reprint was integrated into this section when the exhibition opened at its second venue in 2018.⁴⁴

Despite Martin Parr's engagement, the new edition of *London by Gian Butturini* received only a modest amount of attention outside of Italy.⁴⁵ One of the few reviews speaks of a "unique, previously undiscovered book [and a] testament to the truth: London is a strange, strange place." It also credits the role of Parr who "unearthed LONDON after the many years it spent under the radar, and is responsible for its reprint."⁴⁶ This 'responsibility', which is later turned against him, was relativized by Parr himself several times, most notoriously at the launch of Butturini's book at Photo London, in May 2018, where he makes clear that he does not consider himself the editor of the reprint: "I suggested to Damiani to do a reprint, they contacted the family and [did it]. I wrote a text explaining the full story about the Butturini project and the work, and that's why it says [Edited by Martin Parr] on the cover. It's really cheeky by the way, I could sue myself for claiming that I did the editing, because all I did was adding a few words. Otherwise it's exactly the same as the one before. Here you have the opportunity to have it signed by me, even if it is false news. So ... I am going to send this one to Donald Trump, just to help him along the way."⁴⁷

Reception history May 2019 – February 2021

In late May 2019, the "fairytale"⁴⁸ of the rediscovery of *London* and its reprint radically changed course. It is now well established from a variety of investigations, such as Michiel Kruijt's extensive article for the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*, that the social media protests against *London by Gian Butturini* were initiated by a group of Twitter users, for a "well-prepared" campaign against "the Pope of photography."⁴⁹ This does not mean that the issues at stake should not be openly discussed, or that the

43___ *Photobook Phenomenon*, exhibition at CCCB and FotoColectania, Barcelona, 17 March–24 June 2017.

44___ *Photobook Phenomenon*, Museo San Telmo, San Sebastián, 24 March–17 June 2018.

45___ The presentations in Brescia, Naples, Trieste, and other Italian cities are documented on the website of the Gian Butturini Association <<https://www.gianbutturini.com/mostre-eventi/>> (03.03.2021).

46___ Biju Belinky, 'A voyeuristic look into the lives of 1960's Londoners', HuckMag, <<https://www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/photography-2/london-gian-butturini/>>, published 25 August 2017 (03.03.2021).

47___ YouTube video (reference 20). His assistant Louis Little "saw that the idea that Martin Parr's name is on the cover as a marketing gimmick [...] in order to sell copies, but I also know that Martin's eye for detail can sometimes be lapsed and it's probably something that he agreed to at a certain point, but later he forgot", Interview with Louis Little, 4 December 2020.

48___ Giuseppe Matarazzo, 'Londra, la donna nera e il gorilla: salviamo il book di Butturini', Avvenire, <<https://www.avvenire.it/rubriche/pagine/londra-la-donna-nera-e-il-gorilla-salviamo-il-book-di-butturini>>, published 14 December 2020 (03.03.2021).

interpretation of the double page 78–79 as problematic and offensive is not valid. On the contrary, I genuinely believe that the juxtaposition “horrified”, “appalled”, “disgusted” and “outraged”⁵⁰ many, in a debate involving the photographic community in the UK, the US, and other Western countries, and to a lesser extent, in India, China, Russia and Latin America. It is thus fair to concentrate on these reactions and the possible interpretations of the spread, rather than on the social media campaign *per se*. However, a short summary of the beginning of the campaign, and a few characteristic Twitter threads will illustrate the strategy and rhetoric employed in this undertaking.

On 27 May 2019, three messages from a new account, ‘Less Than Human Debate’ appear on Twitter. The first, posted at 2:40 pm, states that the same afternoon at the National Portrait Gallery, a large museum in the heart of London, pamphlets are being handed out exposing racism in British photography. A photo of that protest is posted in a second tweet, from 7:09 pm. Two young black women show a white couple a pamphlet. ... A third tweet posted at 9:26 PM reveals the target of the action. ‘Utterly horrified and appalled to see this double page layout in a book about London, edited by #MartinParr. It’s time to confront such vile #racism within #BritishPhotography.’⁵¹

The third post, which becomes a “pinned tweet” on the @LTHdebate profile, is accompanied by a photograph of the open book, on a white background, taken with a smartphone camera.⁵² This iconic image, and its label as ‘racist’ has since become a nearly exclusive visual reference for the book and was shared many hundred times on social media.

One of the first reactions to the image was Jennie Ricketts’ one-word post on 28 May 2019: “Speechless!”⁵³ However, after seeing the double page in the context of the book, her perception changed: “My initial reaction to the juxtaposition of a black woman and a gorilla was an emotional response based entirely on the optic presented via social media. Having had time to properly review the context of the imagery and text from the book, I realise it was the wrong conclusion.”⁵⁴ At this point, blogger Ben Chesterton (@duckrabbitblog) still stated that he “would want to see the original before coming to any conclusions” and “decided not to share” the image, a cautious posture that he would soon give up to become a driving force in the campaign

49___ Michiel Kruijt, ‘Martin Parr, Icon of British Photography, in Disgrace After Being Accused of Racism’, *de Volkskrant*, 19.08.2020, online version <<https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/martin-parr-icon-of-british-photography-in-disgrace-after-being-accused-of-racism-ba5a826c/>> (03.03.2021). See also Andrew Mollitor, ‘Social Media Injustice?’, <<https://petapixel.com/2020/09/15/social-media-injustice/>>, published 15 September 2020 (03.03.2021); Manick Govinda, ‘The cancellation of Martin Parr’, *Spiked Online* <<https://www.spiked-online.com/2020/07/27/the-cancellation-of-martin-parr/>>, published 27 July 2020 (03.03.2021); Yates 2019 (reference 4); Tiziano

Butturini’, *Corriere della Sera*, Brescia, 07.01.21.

50___ These words were used in the reactions on twitter and in personal interviews for this article.

51___ Kruijt 2020 (reference 49).

52___ While social media such as twitter erase all metadata of the photographs uploaded to their platforms, the distortion at the edges and the label *Twitter for iPhone* indicate this image was indeed taken with an iPhone.

53___ <<https://twitter.com/jennieric/status/1133142014143471616>>, published 2 December 2020 (03.03.2021).

54___ Personal email conversation with Jennie Ricketts, 3 December 2020.

against racism in British photography, one that he extended to a boycott of Parr's other books and activities.⁵⁵

Another thread was started by Paul Halliday on 19 August 2019 (___ fig. 16). Halliday made a screenshot of an insulting message that he found on Twitter and reposted it on his own account. It shows a young black woman juxtaposed with the gorilla Harambe from the Cincinnati Zoo, and an offending text. Halliday asked whether he should report the tweet, and upon the response of other users apparently took action.

Two days later, Halliday informed his followers that the “disgusting #racist tweet had violated [Twitter’s] rules on hateful conduct” and was removed. However, Halliday himself left his screenshots – and the young victim’s face – visible on his twitter timeline, for more than one and a half years.⁵⁶

This tweet was then reposted by @LTHdebate, three hours later, falsely claiming that it was the “photo edit [...] by #MartinParr” that violated Twitter’s rules of conduct. As visible in (___ fig. 17), the attached image is, indeed, not the offensive aping trope with Harambe, but the iconic juxtaposition from Butturini’s *London* book. Martin Parr’s assistant Louis Little, who saw the post, replied “Except it’s a photo by Gian Butturini,” followed by a ‘shrugging man Emoji’ and the hashtag #Getyourfactsright. LTHDebate, and Paul Halliday reacted adversely to his post.⁵⁷

Several aspects of this thread are representative of the entire social media campaign against the book: First, the tactics of replying numerous times to the same post, in order to create longer threads, paired with forceful language designed to silence further discussion. Second, the fact that incidents which have nothing to do with the Butturini case are pulled into the discussion in a manipulative way. Third, sustained personal attacks were mounted on Martin Parr as the supposed ‘editor’ of the book, and last, all the tweets had little echo, in terms of likes, retweets and replies: While each of the mentioned posts produced between 0 and 12 interactions, the user @plaintangirl, who challenges the un-related racist (and now banned) post with the comment “Still comparing black people to monkeys in 2019? yawn ...” received the impressive number of 71 Retweets and 779 Likes, despite having only 1250 followers.⁵⁸ Even at this point, there was no response on any of Martin Parr’s official social media channels to the discussion.

The contradiction between the vociferous social media campaign on the one hand, and Parr’s silence on the other helped build up the tension over the following months.⁵⁹ He thought his point of view was made clear by repeating that he was not

55 ___ <<https://twitter.com/duckrabbitblog/status/1271451746930393092>>, published 12 June 2020 (03.03.2021); <<https://mobile.twitter.com/duckrabbitblog/status/1359890640008577026>>, published 11 February 2021 (03.03.2021). “The idea that I have formed is that, even though this is about structural racism in British photography, it is also about Martin Parr the photographer; ... what matters is that his name is on a book that has been labelled as racist, and some people feel that they need to turn down Martin Parr, and the foundation, and everyone surrounding him”, Interview Louis Little (reference 47).

56 ___ The screenshot was posted three times in total that day by Paul Halliday <<https://twitter.com/PaulTHalliday/status/1163533408875753477>>, as well

as 1163543190621872128 and 1163536834774872065, published on 19 August 2019 (03.03.2021).

57 ___ <<https://twitter.com/LTHdebate/status/1164256508680527872>> and <https://twitter.com/louis_little/status/1164473922261323776>, published 21 August 2019 (03.03.2021).

58 ___ <https://twitter.com/Tiwajo_/status/1163617910893535233>, published 19 August 2019 (03.03.2021).

59 ___ Asto 2019 (reference 4); Yates 2019 (reference 49); Ben Luke, ‘Cancelled: should good artists pay for bad behaviour?’, Podcast, *The Art Newspaper* online version, published 4 September 2020 (03.03.2021).

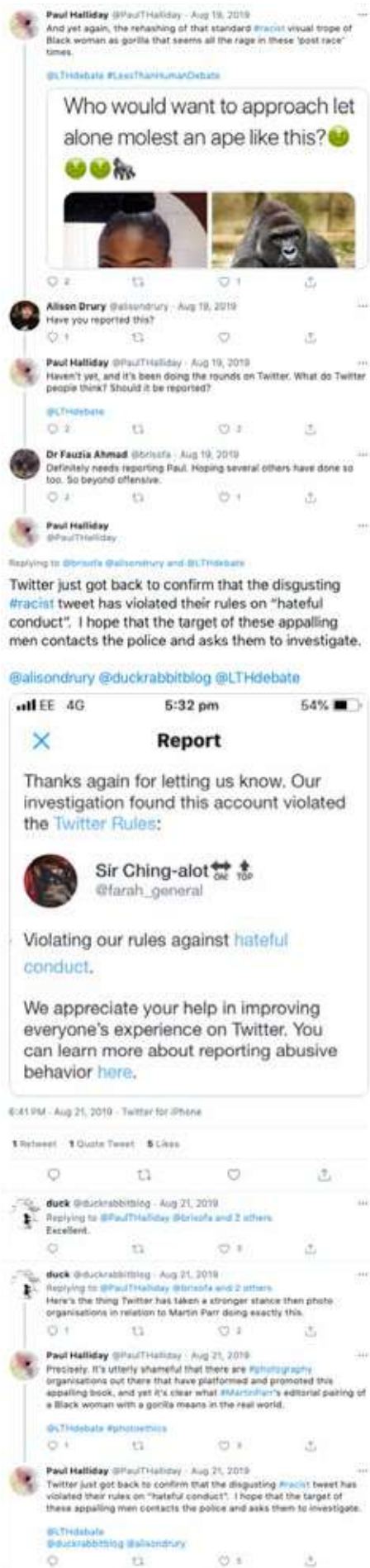


fig.16
Twitter thread from 19 August 2019
<<https://twitter.com/PaulTHalliday/status/1163533408875753477>>.



fig.17
Twitter thread from 21 August 2019
<<https://twitter.com/LTHdebate/status/1164256508680527872>>.

the editor of the book. As he himself does not use social media, his team adhered to the guidelines for small charity communications professionals⁶⁰ against bullying behaviour and trolling, which advises to “give the trolls as little publicity as possible, and avoid a public dispute.” Accordingly, Parr’s apology of 5 December 2019 remained his only ‘public statement’⁶¹ for more than a year. This “inaction, (together with) the added impetus of Black Lives Matter and the Colston statue forced him to act drastically”⁶² later on when he resigned from the Bristol Photo Festival and requested the withdrawal of *London by Gian Butturini* in July 2020.⁶³ Of course, it is easier to judge from a safe historical standpoint than from the midst of unfolding events; however, campaigners and observers suggest that a prompt and direct reaction by Martin Parr, via his social media channels, was expected by the photographic online community, and could have avoided the escalation of events.⁶⁴ This also corresponds to standard rules on social media communication, and on how to react to social media storms or CBAs (which are different from trolling, in that they involve a whole community, not only one malevolent individual).⁶⁵ Parr’s silence and the tardiness of his apologies have thus been consistently criticised in the course of the public discussion, and by the interviewees for this article: “I saw Martin’s apology, but I think it is not enough. I personally believe that he should apologize in a way that people believe in, not only for damage control. He did not edit the book, he is not responsible for the content, and he is not a racist. But he is a public figure, and he has contributed an introduction to a book that has been re-published without the necessary care for context;”⁶⁶ or “I wonder what would have happened if someone, Parr for one, had taken the controversy seriously right away, and faced it with intellectual courage, not only on that specific photographic work, but above all on the language of photography, its ambiguities, its limits when the relationship with justice, ethics and the politics of human coexistence is at stake.”⁶⁷ The lack, or at least slowness, of these broader discussions in the photographic community cannot, of course, be blamed on Martin Parr alone, neither should they take place in a heated social media debate, however necessary this initial impulse may be.⁶⁸

60___ Zoe Williams, ‘Practical tips for dealing with trolling online’ < <https://www.charitycomms.org.uk/practical-tips-for-dealing-with-trolling-online> >, published 19 July 2019 (03.03.2021), mentioned in interview with Martin and Susie Parr, 17.12.2020.

61___ <<https://twitter.com/parrstudio/status/1202607249757286400>>, published 5 December 2019 (03.03.2021). However, as it was a direct reply to a tweet from Jennie Ricketts, of 17 November 2019, and hidden from the general timeline of his studio’s account, this apology was not perceived by many users.

62___ Yates 2019 (reference 49).

63___ Cascone 2020 (reference 23).

64___ For example, “It’s no surprise that @martinparrfdn tweets as a broadcaster and never replies. Despite numerous tweets about the lack of ethical responsibility here, nobody from MP wants to engage ...” <<https://twitter.com/MichaelMarten/status/1282935909575532544>>, published 14 June 2020 (03.03.2021); “Has there been no response from @martinparrfdn on this?” and “Listening isn’t enough if this equals silence.” < <https://twitter.com/xtinawebber/status/1275016087550267393> >, published 22 June 2020 (03.03.2021); and, only one week after the first post by @LTHdebate, “No word yet from Parr

about this issue, and we’re sure many are now waiting for even a comment from the celebrated documentary photographer”, Asto 2019 (reference 4).

65___ Even if this Collaborative Brand Attack (CBA) was a comparatively small niche product of the photographic online community, the definitions and mechanisms still correspond to other CBAs analysed by Philipp A. Rauschnabel, Nadine Kammerlander, and Björn S. Ivens, in their article on ‘Collaborative Brand Attacks in Social Media: Exploring the Antecedents, Characteristics, and Consequences of a New Form of Brand Crises’, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Fall 2016), 381–410. In their terminology, this CBA was caused by an “accidental crisis”, and involved mainly three main “creators”, and several dozen “contributors”, but hundreds of “consumers” of User Generated Content.

66___ Interview with Jorge Luis Álvarez Pupo, on 7 January 2021, see page 150.

67___ Michele Smargiassi, ‘Butturini razzista? Pensieri su un’occasione perduta’, Blog of La Repubblica, <<https://smargiassi-michele.blogautore.repubblica.it/2020/09/30/gian-butturini-ondon-martin-parr-fotografia-razzismo-halliday/>>, published 30 September 2020 (03.03.2021).

fig.18

Exhibition poster for *Save the book*, Spazio d'Arte Scoglio in Milan (10–23 December 2020), organised by Associazione Gian Butturini.

At this crucial point it becomes clear that the reception of the 2017 book consists of three independent, yet interwoven threads: First, the social media storm of May 2019 – July 2020 attacking Parr and talking about racism in British photography; second, its reception in the British and international press⁶⁹ in the summer of 2020, and third, the overwhelming response of the Italian media seeking to “defend in every way the memory and the great cultural legacy of the author”⁷⁰ following the peak of the controversy in the UK and the withdrawal of the book. Several discussions (partly online) were organised in the fall of 2020 and an exhibition called *Save the Book*, curated by Gigliola Foschi took place in December (—fig.18).

The press clippings for this exhibition alone include around 70 news items, both in digital and traditional media,⁷¹ most of them in the local press and specialised media, but also a number of articles in larger newspapers such as *La Repubblica*, and the *Corriere della Sera*, including letters written by Gian Butturini’s heirs, Tiziano and Marta⁷² in which they contend that their father had used the juxtaposition to make an antiracist statement.

Another article mentions the Butturini case together with Philip Guston’s cancelled retrospective, in times of the “nuovi censori supportati dei media”.⁷³ This show is also central in JJ Charlesworth’s essay about the ‘new orthodoxy’, and his argument that “present-day theoretical fashions regarding race – of an undifferentiated ‘whiteness’ and ‘white supremacy’ – are projected back onto history” seems highly relevant for understanding the Butturini case.⁷⁴

A transparent cage in the midst of the waves of humanity

The juxtaposition of the black ticket inspector of the London Underground and Guy, the famous gorilla of the Regent Park Zoo, certainly has perplexed and offended some contemporary viewers, including Mercedes Baptiste Halliday, who started the social media



68___ “I completely recognize the endemic issues of social media, but they are imperfect engines for change,” Tom Seymour personal interview on 2 December 2020.

69___ “The zeitgeist is on social media now rather than big newspapers and magazines, (and today) social media is driving the agenda”, Seymour 2020 (reference 68).

70___ <<https://www.gianbutturini.com>>, published 23 September 2020 (03.03.2021).

71___ I would like to thank Rocío Sola helping me to analyze this material, provided to me by De Angelis Press, Milano, and the Butturini family. I am also thankful to Verónica Losantos and Javier Fernández for the book reproductions.

72___ Butturini 2021 (reference 49).

73___ Matteo Bergamini, ‘L’arte deve tornare reazionaria’, *Magazine D, La Repubblica* (30.01.2021), 46–49.

74___ JJ Charlesworth, *Art Against Orthodoxy*, Letters on Liberty, 2021.

campaign.⁷⁵ An argument against her statement that the spread was “nothing but racist and offensive”⁷⁶ was made at the very beginning of her protest, yet featured less prominently in the debate. It is maybe best summarized by Stefania Ragusa in her article for the Italian online magazine *Africa*: “The subjects are intentionally juxtaposed, not to suggest the vulgar equation black = monkey, but to show the solitudes of the metropolis and its invisible barriers,”⁷⁷ especially for those who are excluded from society: “In England black immigrants are apparently tolerated, but in practice marginalised. You only have to walk around London to realise how black people are employed in the most humble jobs,” writes Butturini in his biography, twenty years after the publication of *London*.⁷⁸ Issues of race and its representation were very present in the late 1960s, and the death of Martin Luther King was widely covered in the Italian media. Butturini was immersed in the debate and “very clear about which side he was on: that of black people, the immigrants, the workers and the marginalised. He is openly anti-racist.”⁷⁹ His original introduction text speaks about this, yet the beat generation style poetry and the translation⁸⁰ for the reprint make it hard to appreciate this at a glance:

I did photograph a black woman, locked in a transparent cage; she was selling tickets for the Underground: just a listless prisoner, an immobile island outside time in the midst of the waves of humanity flowing by and mixing and then splitting aside around her prison of ice and solitude.

The waves of humanity flowing around the transparent cages of the ticket controllers of the London underground during rush hour can be appreciated in (___ fig. 19), whereas (___ fig. 20) shows that, for the London Transport company, the future lay in automated turnstiles that would soon make her job redundant. In the same text, a few lines further down, Butturini also speaks about the photograph of the “Regent’s Park gorilla, which with imperial dignity receives the witticisms and peel thrown at it by its nephews in ties.” The contact sheets show that Butturini had made three pictures, all of them using the same distance and framing to highlight the fact that the gorilla was behind bars (___ fig. 21). Even if we may suppose that the pairing was the result of a later ‘montaggio’, these images reveal the intention to show Guy as what many Londoners saw him to be: a peaceful and majestic giant in a cage.⁸¹

75___ For example: “Why did Butturini place these images alongside each other? Is he comparing the black woman to a gorilla – is it a racist image? Or is he making a different kind of point?”, Govinda 2020 (reference 49); “It’s not entirely clear what intention Butturini, who died in 2006, had by juxtaposing the ticket inspector next to a gorilla”, ‘Martin Parr cancelled over ‘racist’ affiliation’, <<https://www.insideimaging.com.au/2020/martin-parr-cancelled-over-racist-affiliation/>>, published 5 August 2020 (03.03.2021); “The black ticket collector in a box is placed next to the gorilla in a box, and it seems impossible that this isn’t on purpose, but again, what does it mean?”, Andrew Mollitor, Crit: London by Gian Butturini, <<http://photothunk.blogspot.com/2020/07/crit-london-by-gian-butturini.html>>, published 28 July 2020 (03.03.2021).
76___ <<https://twitter.com/LTHdebate/status/1133144501348917254>>, published 28 May 2019 (03.03.2021).

77___ “I soggetti sono intenzionalmente accostati, non per suggerire la crassa equazione nero=scimmia, ma per mostrare le solitudini della metropoli e le sue sbarre non sempre visibili”, Stefania Ragusa, ‘Cancel culture. Gian Butturini messo al macero’, *Africa* <<https://www.africanvista.it/cancel-culture-gian-butturini-messo-al-macero/165821/>>, published 6 August 2020 (03.03.2021).

78___ “In Inghilterra gli immigrati di colore sono apparentemente tollerati, ma in pratica emarginati. Basta girare per Londra, per rendersi conto di come i neri sono impiegati nei lavori più umili” Gian Butturini, *Daiquiri*, Teti 1989, 27.
79___ Ragusa 2020 (reference 77).

80___ For example, “I negri sono tristi. I negri sono buoni” would probably sound different to our contemporary ears, if translated not as “The blacks are sad. The blacks are good.” but “Black people are sad. Black people are nice.”



fig. 19
 H K Nolan, *Rush hour crowds exiting through the Metropolitan line barriers at Baker Street Underground station on New Year's Day 1964 (1 January was, at that time, a normal working day), 1 January 1964, gelatine silver print.* © TfL from the London Transport Museum collection.

fig. 20
 H K Nolan, *Ticket barrier at Ravenscourt Park Underground station, District line. A passenger is using one of the experimental ticket gates, 27 May 1964, gelatin silver print.* © TfL from the London Transport Museum collection.





fig. 21
Gian Butturini, Untitled (Guy the Gorilla), London 1969, contact print of 35mm negative strip, showing images 31–33. A cropped version of negative 33 was used for the book *London* by Gian Butturini, Verona 1969/Bologna 2017, page 79.

Burgin's analysis of Gary Winogrand's untitled photograph taken in Central Park Zoo in 1967, showing an interracial couple holding chimpanzees dressed in children's clothing, contends that the issue of representation is less photographic than cultural: "Neither the photographer, nor the medium, nor the subject, are basically responsible for the meaning of this photograph, the meaning is produced, in the act of looking at the image, by a way of talking."⁸²

Butturini's case is more complicated, because there is a graphic intervention, a visual construction using not one, but two (seemingly unrelated) images, which are put together to create a third image. A result of an editing process, this third image, both in a literal and metaphoric sense, lives in and by the opposition of the former two, by absorbing their original meanings into a new – and very complicated – message.⁸³ This oppositional editing was first used to effect by John Heartfield, and employed on both sides of the political spectrum. For the Italian context of the 1960s and 70s example, the right wing magazine *Il Borghese* may serve as an example for how this kind of pairing became a common practice in popular culture.⁸⁴ In the edgy, jazz-like image-flow of Butturini's book, these full-bleed double pages evoke the viewing experience of an experimental film of these years: rough, provocative and politically charged, just like the final sequences of the Santiago Álvarez anti-racist film *Now!* (Cuba, 1965). In the book, we see images of Jews and barbed wires, young boys with swastikas, drug addicts, homeless and hippies ... no wonder that the juxtaposition of the ticket controller and the caged animal does not affect us here in the same way as its meme-sized image on social media. In the personal conversations with interview partners and the analysis of hundreds of tweets, comments, and blog entries, I have found that many people do indeed have very strong reactions to the image pair, while black and people of colour are especially sensitive to it. For me, as a white man who was born and raised in Austria, the Jew/barbed wire/Swastika double-pages (— figs. 13–14) were at least as strikingly provocative,⁸⁵ which seems to

81 — Guy was sent to London Zoo from Paris, in exchange for a zebra and a tiger in late 1947, and received his name because he arrived on the evening of 5 November, Guy Fawkes Night, the annual commemoration of the 1605 attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament by the Catholics. Today, his stuffed skin is one of the highlights of the Treasures Gallery of the Natural History Museum, <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/feb/03/new-ape-guy-the-gorilla>>, published 28 February 2021 (03.03.2021).

82 — Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory. Criticism and Postmodernity*, London 1986, 64.

83 — "In editing a coherent group of photographs born from a clear idea with an equally precise purpose we should first ask ourselves how the final result of our editing visual and narrative will be read and interpreted by those who judge it.", Leonello Bertolucci, *Il photo editing. Scegliere le immagini nel racconto fotografico*, Emuse 2020, as cited in the Zoom conference 'Il caso Butturini. Un libro da bruciare?', organised by Organizzazione 36° Fotogramma – Genova, <<https://youtu.be/YUeXBwORY7A>>, published 3 November 2020 (03.03.2021).

84 — Federica Chiocchetti, interview on 2 February 2021.

85 — Damion Berger, a photographer of Jewish origin from London, has expressed the same uneasiness with these images: His interpretation of the four pages (figs. 13–14) is that they mean "If we forget history, it will repeat itself". Interview on 2 February 2021.

prove Burgin's argumentation that we cannot choose what we know, and neither can we choose what part of our dormant knowledge will be awakened by an image, regardless of how much we may strain to maintain a disinterested, purely visual apprehension of it.

The role of the viewer in this operation is heavily underlined in Butturini's introductory text: "This book is something you add to as well, lending it your attention your curiosity your sensitivity: brain and heart."⁸⁶ Is it wrong to describe the spread as racist, because such 'racism' is not 'in' the photographs themselves, as Burgin would have it? Do we have to find binding proof that the Italian (and British) public of the late 1960s would not have understood the aping trope? After all, the author himself had singled out the two images and provided the context for their reading in his introductory text.

When I showed the double page to David L. Smith, author of the book *Less Than Human*,⁸⁷ in an online interview, he told me that he could not help seeing the spread as racist, and explained that the juxtaposition "is very powerful because it elicits in the viewer a racist idea that we all have, because we are embedded in the culture, we are embedded in the ideology. So, when I am saying that I cannot help seeing it as racist, this is not based on a historical reflection on ape images, but it's hitting me very forcibly. ... So, in a way, the image presents a real challenge to the viewer. It is making it clear to the viewers that they have these racist representations marinated into them. That's part of our history and our culture."⁸⁸ However, he also suggested using more precise terms than 'racist' to describe the exact feelings that people have when they see the double page today. This roughly corresponds with Burgin's claim that "such 'isms', in the sphere of representation, are a complex of texts, rhetorics, codes, woven into the fabric of the popular pre-conscious" of all of us, regardless of the colour of our skin. American scholar Emilie C. Boone proposes "to have viewers see these two images and understand the book through a number of different lenses that draw on issues of race and representation."⁸⁹

Indeed, Butturini could have used any other zoo inhabitant to compare the women's condition to a caged animal, yet he chose to "unmask the stereotype by overturning it on the spectator,"⁹⁰ and when we become aware of the unpleasant reaction triggered by this mechanism, we are tempted to divest ourselves of that feeling. One way to do this is to question our own role, our gaze, our visual literacy, and the culture we are embedded in, to understand why this manipulation works so frighteningly well. Another one is "to place the racism in the photographer rather than in ourselves."⁹¹

86— "Il libro lo fate anche voi, prestandogli la vostra attenzione la vostra curiosità la vostra sensibilità: cervello e cuore." Note that the literal translation of the first part of the phrase would be "You also make the book", which gives even more weight to the viewer's interpretation. The last phrase of the introduction repeats this claim: "If I have reached the goal of saying something authentic ... then it will also be thanks to you (il merito sarà anche vostro)".

87— David L. Smith, *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*, New York, 2011, which, together with the title of Parr's show, *Only Human*, may have inspired the name of the twitter account @LTHdebade.

88— David Livingston Smith, interview on 18 December 2020.

89— Emilie C. Boone, interview on 28 December 2020.

90— Smargiassi 2020 (reference 67).

91— Smith 2020 (reference 88).

»We Need to Learn to Listen«

Conversation between **Azu Nwagbogu** and **Moritz Neumüller**.
Azu Nwagbogu is the founder and director of the African Artists' Foundation (AAF), a non-profit organisation based in Lagos, Nigeria that is dedicated to the promotion and development of contemporary African arts and artists.

Moritz Neumüller: Dear Azu, thank you for accepting to be interviewed for this discussion on the book *London by Gian Butturini*, and the rather problematic issues around it.

Azu Nwagbogu: Thank you for the courage to speak about this complex topic. I think it's time that we move away from the word 'problematic'. We hide too many things in that lazy word. When we speak about this book, we also need to think about its historic context, about the intentions of the artist, and we need to understand what the prevailing circumstances were when the work was made. The 1960s were probably the peak of the Windrush generation with a sudden influx of Afro-Caribbeans and others from Africa and the Commonwealth who came to work and earn a living in the United Kingdom. Racism was rife with lots of overt racism and tensions in society. Butturini was 100 % aware of this and the danger of aping blackness and its dehumanising effect. Of course, we will never fully understand Butturini's personal position. What we have to do is to acknowledge that the work does exist. I think that censorship is the original sin of art. If we cancel works of art such as this book, we allow for people in the future, to imagine that there were never these kinds of associations. This diminishing of other cultures and the association with primitivity is very well documented, and photography had been the biggest culprit in sculpting this narrative. Gian Butturini was aware of this.

MN: Yet, how do we have to treat such imagery today?

AN: We have to understand the times, and how these convictions and ideas come to be, but from a contemporary context. It's all about the conditions, the presentation, the understanding, and the conviction produced by the artwork and its exhibition. So, cancel culture and censorship are not helpful when we think about how to deal with contentious images today. We have to have some sensitivity: We cannot destroy them, and we cannot suppress them. We know what happens if we try to suppress these records, they come up in backspaces where they will recreate another history, another aesthetics, another narrative contrary to the real situation. This is the way proto-fascism works. In my view, we need to ventilate these narratives and demystify them. These materials should be handled with great sensitivity and care and this is where curators can distinguish themselves.

MN: I have reached out quite a lot to get different points of view in the course of my research for the article. One person, who had been quite active in the conversation around the book, declined my request for a formal interview by saying she was careful not to give up her time, energy, and expertise, quoting Toni Morrison's famous words that "the function of racism is distraction". This quote, and the way it was thrown at me, has had a deep impact, and in retrospect, I have to be thankful for it, because it has made me think, and listen to the full speech, again.

AN: The problem is that people get weary. If we keep asking the same people to give us the answers, we steal their time and we block their creative energies. I am not suggesting that you are doing this, but when this person quoted Toni Morrison, she meant that. That people keep you busy, instead of doing the work themselves. You see, every time that there is a problem of racism in football, they go to John Barnes, and they keep asking his opinion. I think that's emotional abuse. Everyone should do the work for themselves.

MN: Well, let's get to work then: I think that, in order to understand Gian Butturini's spirit, when he started his artistic career in the field of photography, it might be useful to quote a few more words of that same Toni Morrison speech that evening, about six years after the

publication of *London*. She said that “since not history, not anthropology, not social sciences seem capable in a strong and consistent way to grapple with the problem of racial representation, it may very well be left to the artists to do it.”¹ And I think that is exactly what Butturini tried to do. The problem is that I have found that most of the people who speak about the book have not actually seen the book.

1 — Toni Morrison, ‘Black Studies Center public dialogue. Pt. 2’, Portland State University, 1975, Special Collections: Oregon Public Speakers, 90, <<http://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/11309>> (03.03.2021).

AN: That’s the problem! Most of the people who speak about the book have not seen it! They only have seen the image of the double-page. And yet they want to cancel the book. Out of one hundred people who see this image on the internet, ninety-five will say that it is completely abysmal and wrong. And given those parameters they won’t necessarily be wrong. They do not realise that the book is in fact a book about the absurdities in London and that perhaps Gian Butturini is trying to make a statement about racial injustice. Given these parameters you may then have a different position. And this is why I think that censorship is a dangerous sliding slope. Today, it’s much easier to generate, and share, and juxtapose images with speed than to construct and identify new meanings. And that’s why we have to work much harder. We are more visually literate today than half a century or even ten years ago. We are looking at more images and have become faster in processing them.

MN: That’s a point I would like to question. I think we have become faster in reading images, but not necessarily better. For me, to be visually literate means that you are able to see the variety of different readings for an image and to accept the contradiction. Many people who have been involved in this controversy, especially those who are for the cancellation of the book, have been carefully trying to protect their interpretation as the only possible one.

AN: Precisely! We are reading faster and comprehending less. We observe this sort of visual illiteracy in fake news and conspiracy theories, such as the Covid-19 anti-vaccine propaganda. As you say, there is a difference in being able to read an image and being able to understand it. Much like the difference in receptivity between listen-

ing and hearing or reading and studying. Today we live under what I call data colonisation. Through algorithms a few billionaires play God and completely change and manage nation states and cultures. It’s a feedback mechanism that is splitting the world apart. We only see what we want to see, we only read what we want to read, there are not enough touch points and convergences. We need these conversations, to discuss our interpretations of an image, and not to take them as given. Photography is a stool that sits on three legs: the image, the caption, and publishing. Today we are able to make more and more images and publish them immediately, but the captions will always be dubious because of their reductionism. I believe it is important for us to spark another level of visual intellect that is not shaped or manipulated by a tendentious position. The intelligent position raises questions and stimulates discourse; these positions are unchangeable in the face of bare facts and truths. We not only have a lot of images, but we also have overrepresentation on the publishing side. Everybody can post an existing image with a new caption and publish it on their social media. We have an overrepresentation of the caption. We are not getting the balance right, between the image, its caption and publishing. The stool is tilted and unbalanced.

MN: And what can bring us out of these filter bubbles, or preference bubbles as they have also been called?

AN: We need to learn to listen. A dying decaying form of learning and intelligence is the ability to listen. We also have to understand that diversity is not just about fairness, it’s also about learning. It just makes more sense to have all sections of society represented in various aspects of life and especially in culture and museology because these are the civic spaces that teach values which shape our future.

MN: Thank you for taking your time to have this conversation with me!

This conversation took place on 11 February 2021.



fig.22
 Gian Butturini, *London by Gian Butturini*, Bologna 2017, showing the transition between the double-pages 86–87 and 88–89. Photograph by Verónica Losantos.

In view of these deliberations, might one suppose that the spread was meant as a political statement against discrimination and racial injustice in its time, but can still be read as offensive and problematic today? The philosopher Erich Hatala Matthes supports this as a plausible hypothesis and points to connections to other political art and satire, “where there is this really fine line between the representation of certain morally criticisable ideas in an artwork and the commentary on those ideas within the same artwork.”⁹²

Conclusions and future research

The analysis of the original book, its reprint and the decontextualized image of a double page spread posted on social media has shown that context is a key factor for the interpretation of the book: Meaning is attached to the medium, in terms of size, materiality, and narrative flow. The personal reading experience depends on factors such as the weight, smell and texture of the paper, and the turning of a page reveals metaphoric and material connections throughout the book (—fig. 22). Without these experiences and connections, what used to (and should) be defined by the artist, and the viewer, is now adapted to the screen size of our technical devices, and ‘our’ choices are made by algorithms that have been optimized for profitability.

92 — Erich Hatala Matthes, interview on 15 December 2020. See also Luke 2020 (reference 59).

If visual studies have taught us anything at all, it would be that a single reading of any image simply does not exist, and that visual literacy does not denote the ability to read pictures correctly, or quickly, or even in great quantities, but to be willing to accept multiple readings of the same image. We must therefore not be judged for our condition and the knowledge that leads us to our own reading, but by our ability and willingness to accept other readings, and learn from the differences between the two. No lecturing, no threats or accusations will make viewers change their instinctive interpretation of visual information, only the empathic comprehension that other views may exist and that they can enrich our own understanding.

This does, of course, not mean that we may not, or should not, defend our own point of view, yet this has to be accompanied by the awareness that images are not autonomous carriers of a unique message; that they have never been, nor can ever become a universal language, because their reading depends on personal, cultural, historic and contextual factors. The author can and should, of course, be aware of possible unwanted readings and provide a context for the interpretation. Butturini's introductory text should be seen as such an attempt, as it explicitly mentions the two images and proposes a certain reading mechanism: marginalisation, cage, dignity.

Future research – beyond the scope of this paper – could involve a more thorough analysis of structural racism in the photographic community, the role of cultural and language differences in the conflict around Butturini's book, and an in-depth analysis of the rhetoric used in social media communications. Another possibility, endorsed by several interviewees, is a participatory project to produce an Addendum for the reprint of *London by Gian Butturini*. This document could enable readers to contextualise the often disquieting images that the author, according to his own introduction, edited into 'controversial pairings.'

The possible reading of the juxtaposition as a literal comparison of a black woman and a gorilla is a risk that the author has taken, and will be judged for.⁹³ His diary of images, as Butturini calls the book, "arose from an inner impulse, as sudden and violent as a stone thrown at my head," leaving the general interpretation of the book in the "brains and hearts" of the viewers. The cancellation of the book, in any case, will not solve the problem of racism, neither in photography, nor in society as a whole. It will merely leave a hole in the fabric of history, and deprive us of a work of art that could help us to understand a historic context and learn from its analysis.⁹⁴ If we follow Smargiassi's opinion that the 'Parr-Butturini' case is a "gigantic missed opportunity for all, for those who started the war, those who suffered it, and mostly, those who love visual culture,"⁹⁵ it is hoped that the present article, and further investigation will provide a new opportunity for important structural changes in the photographic community and open discussions around the photographic medium.

93____ The spread has been called a "brutally naïve choice, in terms of visual representation", Pupo 2021 (reference 66); an "unfortunate set of editing decisions on Butturini's part", Stockdale 2020 (reference 25); and "seriously

bad judgement, [with] 'othering' at work, whether knowingly or unknowingly", Molitor 2020 (reference 75).

94____ Damion Berger 2021 (reference 85).

95____ Smargiassi 2020 (reference 67).

IMPRINT

PhotoResearcher No. 35, October 2021

The magazine of the European Society
for the History of Photography (ESHPh)
A-1020 Vienna, Komödiengasse 1/1/17
office@eshph.org
eshph.org

EDITORS

Ulla Fischer-Westhauser, Uwe Schögl

GUEST EDITORS

Christoph Schaden

Art historian and Professor for Image Science at the
Faculty for Design of the TH Nuremberg GSO

Markus Schaden

Bookseller, Publisher, and Founding Director of The
PhotoBookMuseum, Cologne

TRANSLATOR

Robert Scott McInnes

COPY EDITING

Ulla Fischer-Westhauser

COVER IMAGE

**Detail from: Michael Schmidt, Einar Schleef, *Waffenruhe*,
Berlin 1987, 11. © Foundation for Photography and Media
Art with the Michael Schmidt Archive, Berlin.**

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Bernhard Schorner

Sophie Schäfer for pages 41–47

IMAGE EDITING

Robert Vanis

PHOTOBOOK REPRODUCTION

Frederic Lezmi for pages 1–133

© 2021 European Society for the History of Photography
(ESHPh) and authors.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced
or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or
mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any other
information storage and retrieval system, without the written
permission of the publisher. Every effort has been made to
locate the copyright holders for the photographs used in
the magazine. We welcome any pertaining information.

ISSN: 0958 2606

Price: EUR 18

Printed in Austria

by Holzhausen Druck & Medien GmbH., Vienna



Printed with support from:

Federal Ministry Republic of Austria | ZeroFourFoundation
Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport | gGmbH, Berlin

 Bundesministerium
Kunst, Kultur,
öffentlicher Dienst und Sport

Preview

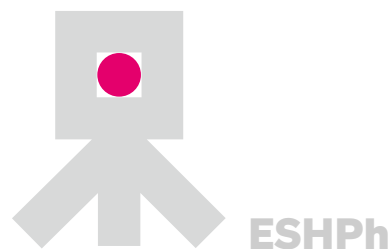
PhotoResearcher No. 36

Publication date: October 2021

Private Photo Collecting

EDITORS

Ulla Fischer-Westhauser, Uwe Schögl



PhotoResearcher

The international magazine for photo history.
Order and information: eshph.org

This version is for academic and educational use only.