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Entangled empathy, drug use, and photographs of suffering

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ABSTRACT

With the aim of analyzing relationships between photography, empathy, viewing contexts, and circulation, this article examines two case studies where contemporary photographers have depicted injection drug users over a period. It uses Gruen's theory of entangled empathy, a way of practicing empathy that derives from an ethics of care, to analyze them. In the online series *The Faces of Addiction*, 2011–2015, Chris Arnade documented the lives of several subjects in the Hunts Point area of the Bronx, New York City. Arnade's goals were to use photography to reach a wide audience, to humanize drug users, and to reveal the structural inequalities that he believed caused addiction. Viewers engaged with the photographs on social media. In the second case, Canadian photographer Tony Fouhse depicted Stephanie MacDonald, a woman he met on the street in Ottawa, as she struggled through drug dependence, a health crisis, and recovery. This project is entitled *Live Through This*, 2013. Fouhse's audience viewed the photographs in the more traditional spaces of art gallery and photography book. He also workshopped some of the photographs on his blog. These differing projects and viewing contexts elicit a range of empathic engagements with the photographs and the subjects depicted in them. Examining such photographic projects through the lens of entangled empathy reveals potential policy implications.

Introduction

Photographs of suffering are commonplace in the traditional media, online, and in galleries and museums. In this article, I address photographs of a particular suffering: the suffering that is endured by injection drug users who are under-housed and living in poverty. Following Fitzgerald (2002, 2015) I use the term "drug photography" to describe this category of images, although the photographs I look at fall into subcategories as they are presented as art and documentary. While I use the term "addiction," I am mindful that it is a contested term and a "slippery and problematic concept" (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009, p. 5). As Fraser, Moore & Keane (2014) note, the term has been connected to moralising, criminalising, and medicalising discourses. Scholarly analysis of these discourses, while valuable, creates other sets of problems, namely the impression that addiction is a monolith, already existing and ready for analysis. Citing Law (2011) and Mol (1999), Fraser et al assert that there is no stable category of "addiction"; rather it is an "assemblage," "an *ad hoc* cluster of knowledges, technologies, bodies and practices that contingently gather to form a temporary phenomenon" (19). Empathy may also be seen as one such assemblage that emerges across the varying contexts in which drug photographs are presented and consumed. Therefore, I examine the ways in which these photographs are created, circulate, and are received by viewers in different contexts, such as in books, galleries and online, and how differing presentational formats and viewing contexts impact engagement with empathy.

To examine photographs of people who inject drugs (PWID) seems to slice a subject so thinly that there might not be much material, and yet, there is *much* material. While photographers have depicted drug use since the 19th century, injection drug use has captured their attention in the last 10–15 years. For example, a quick search of any stock photo agency turns up numerous clichéd and stylized photographs of people injecting drugs. In a well-known documentary project, photojournalist Jessica Dimmock (Dimmock & Morley, 2007) infiltrated a community of drug users and published a controversial book of photographs. Major news outlets have published stories about Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs in the Philippines and America's "opioid crisis" that include photographs of injection drug users (Natcheway, 2018, 2017). And recently, under the guise of "helping" people to see the effects of opiate addiction in Ohio, USA, police took and shared photographs of two adults overdosing in their minivan while a child sat in the back (McLaughlin, 2016). The photos went viral and circulated through online, print and televised news media. Public response to the sensationalized photographs was either vitriolic and ruthless or pitying and sentimental.

It is within this climate of abundant sensationalism, continued attachment to the idea that photographs represent reality, and desire for sentiment that I examine the work of Chris Arnade and Tony Fouhse,

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two contemporary photographers who have addressed drug use and addiction in their work. Like the photographs described above, their work is polarizing. Previous studies have analysed these kinds of contrasts from a range of perspectives. Employing Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "faciality," Fitzgerald (2002, 2015) critiques photographs of drug users within several genres including documentary and photo-ethnography. Meanwhile, in *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009), an ethnographic study of heroin injectors in San Francisco, Bourgois and Schonberg perform photo-ethnography, but are critically aware of the dangers of allowing the photographs to float without captions and field notes to structure their meaning, lest they reproduce negative stereotypes and "voyeuristic pornography" (9). Tackling another subset of drug photography, Marsh, Copes, & Linnemann (2017) examine anti-meth ad campaigns "as a site of voyeuristic consumption of penal spectatorship" (55). Like others (Linnemann & Wall, 2013), they employ Brown's (2009) work regarding a "culture of punishment." Campaigns such as these are warranted as sites of analysis for they contribute to negative stereotypes about drug users (Walker, 2017). This article both draws on and adds to research in the field of drug photography. It pays particular attention to the discourses (or "genres" as Fitzgerald calls them) of art photography and documentary photography, although it acknowledges that these categories are neither discrete nor clearly defined, especially in the post-photographic age (Solomon-Godeau, 2017).

Like photographic categories, empathy resists definition. I am particularly interested in the ways in which Arnade and Fouhse's photographic projects may or may not create, document, describe and elicit empathy for subjects in crisis and how that relationship of empathy is connected to or influenced by the circulation of photographs. At the same time, I acknowledge that this research might be better served by the word "empathies" because viewers will bring various capacities for empathy to the subject depending on their experiences, knowledge, and backgrounds.

Methods

I began following Chris Arnade's Facebook page in 2012 and by 2015 noticed four connected patterns. First, the photographer used familiar visual tropes in some of his images. These tropes, such as graphic shots of users injecting, closely cropped photographs of faces in crisis, or scenes depicting lone users on the street, were familiar from histories of art and photojournalism, particularly in photographs that depict drug use or street life. Yet, second, the photographer diverged from these familiar tropes in many of his photographs, particularly in the way that his subjects engaged with the camera. Third, his photographs were rarely posted without descriptive text. And, finally, fourth, viewers reacted to these images with less hostility than I expected (they didn't call PWID names like "junky," for example). In fact, many of the comments seemed supportive.

I looked for signs of empathy in Arnade's style, approach, and subject matter, as well as in the way the photographs circulated. I compared his work to Fouhse's book *Live through this* because they covered similar subject matter and emerged at the same time. Like Arnade, Fouhse also avoided so-called "ripping and running" where the photographer enters the scene, takes pictures, and then leaves the subject without having bettered his or her life (Fitzgerald, 2002: 373). Rather, he spent a year with his subject, working relationally. Yet, unlike Arnade, Fouhse participated in traditional contemporary art discourses. His output was material. And, unlike Arnade, as an artist, the work was about his experience of his photographic subject as much as it was about sharing her story (Fouhse, interview, 2016).

I settled on the photographs Arnade took of Shelly as my object of study. Shelly's name appears as "Shelley," "Michael," and "Michelle" in Arnade's posts; I have used "Shelly" here for consistency. This subsection of his larger body of work had a continuity and equivalence with Fouhse's project: both worked with a white, female subject; both isolated the subject from a larger group; in both cases, the photographer formed a bond with the subject; in both cases the subject expressed a desire to be "helped"; and, finally, in both cases the photographer expressed a desire to "help" the subject, and that help involved "getting clean." These groups of photographs both reproduced and challenged traditional photographic discourses about drug use, poverty, and street life, which would make for meaningful analysis regarding empathy.

The next step was to gather data, using processes appropriate to the field of art history. This entailed reading primary and secondary sources on empathy as a humanistic domain that examined the word's roots and the idea's history, its place in aesthetic philosophy, and its complexity of meaning in contemporary discourse. It was also necessary to review similar sets of photographs from the history of photography. In addition, I read all the captions and surrounding written material associated with the chosen photographs, including: comments on social media posts; reviews of both photographers' work; published interviews with the photographers on these two projects; other related written material, such as Arnade's articles for the *Guardian*. I interviewed both photographers in July 2016 by Skype/telephone. Questions centred on their reasons for undertaking these projects, their process, their aims, their relationships with the subjects, whether they were actively seeking or using empathy, and follow up questions related to their practice.

To assess empathy, I performed close visual analysis of the photographs in context, and, in the case of Arnade, compared them across social media platforms wherever possible. I transcribed comments that seemed to express empathy from three places: Arnade's most controversial photographs of Shelly preparing or ingesting drugs published on Facebook (13, 14 December 2013 and 26 July 2014); a post that depicted Shelly entering rehab (24 April 2014); and a later update on Shelly (23 March 2015). These photographs mirrored the narrative depicted in Fouhse's book.

Working with photographs posted online via social media presents specific challenges. Online photographs are ephemeral and disappear. This was the case with Arnade's (2017b) Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr accounts, which he removed in late summer/early fall 2017. While http://archive.org/web/ is available to view the Tumblr posts about Shelly, the other material is gone. This means it becomes difficult to cite specific comments unless they are preserved in notes. In addition, Arnade explained that he regularly removed comments from his Facebook page. For these reasons, I have not used comments to make definitive statements about empathy and audience but use them in conjunction with other material to make general statements about the photographs and how empathy might be read through them.

As the investigation of the materials progressed, the tools of analysis were refined. A close examination of the photographs in context revealed that traditional understandings of empathy were not adequate, so I read the images through Gruen's concept of "entangled empathy." The analysis in this article focuses on the potential for empathy and seeks to find where empathy arises or might arise, rather than where it is foreclosed.

Entangled empathy

Philosopher and activist Lori Gruen's theory of entangled empathy is born of ethics of care (Gruen, 2015). Where traditional ethical theories of justice use abstraction to make moral judgments, an ethics of care considers context, relationality, connection, and responsiveness when tackling moral problems. Ethics of care "recognize[s] that reason cannot be isolated from embodied emotional experiences." (p.37). Gruen proposes entangled empathy as an extension of ethics of care. Entangled empathy is "a process that involves integrating a range of thoughts and feelings to try to get an accurate take on the situation of another and figure out what, if anything, we are called upon to do" (p. 80). This process begins when the empathizer notices the other and their wellbeing. Next the empathizer "reflectively imagines himself in the position of the other" (p. 51). They will then "assess the situation

and figure out what information is pertinent to empathize effectively with the being in question" (p. 51). This process is non-linear and involves testing, re-evaluation, further information gathering, imagination, and self-examination. To avoid projection, the empathizer does not aim to find herself and the other "merged into the same perspective" but rather in relation to one another (p. 66). Gruen's philosophy can be applied to photographs of suffering, particularly those in the field of drug photography.

As sites of meaning, where meaning is constructed by viewers, subjects, photographers, environment, and context, photographs require both affect and imagination. The roots of the term "empathy" lie in the experience of looking and derive from aesthetic philosophy (Koss, 2006). Scholars who bring together affect studies with the field of photography analyse emotion in photography (Brown & Phu, 2014; Mavor, 1995; Phu & Steer, 2009; Smith, 2013). While empathy, for Gruen, is not an emotion, but a process, it is a process that is set in motion by emotion. In her analysis of empathy and looking, Kaplan (2014) argues that "witnessing" is the prosocial and therefore desirable form of empathy, which combines elements of "vicarious trauma" with what Kaplan, following Hoffman, terms "empathy proper" or a "deeply and enduring identification with what the victims in the case feel" (p. 270). She suggests those photographs that provoke ethical and empathic witnessing are viewed within a context linking individuals to larger groups or issues which, ideally, reveals the perpetrators. Seeing others as part of a community, Kaplan argues, promotes empathic witnessing that has the potential to provoke action. And, indeed, as Kaplan states, empathy can have specific, targeted outcomes, both short-term (donating to a charitable organization) or long-term (changes to one's attitude towards a marginalized group), but these outcomes are not guaranteed.

The idea and practice of empathy via photographs is not without complications. There are dangers in engaging with another's experience, from personal, social, and ethical perspectives. For example, empathy can function as appropriation. Imagining oneself in the place of the other potentially de-emphasizes the experience of specific groups who undergo systemic discrimination. Following Saidiya Hartman (1997) on the slipperiness of empathy, Brown (2014) unpacks the intricate feelings that are attached to Kevin Carter's infamous photograph of a dying Sudanese girl. Brown writes about empathy as the erasure of the other: "[t]he emotive affect of this photographic humanitarianism lies in its gesture of distanced absorption and empathy. While the viewer supposes that the evidentiary value of the documentary photograph allows him or her to feel what the subject in the photo feels, this is a fallacy of liberal intention" (p. 187). She asks "who feels for the girl?" (p. 193). How, then, might we examine photographs within the framework of empathy despite these ethical complications?

Gruen's process of entangled empathy mitigates some of these concerns. As a relational process that strives for altruism, entangled empathy "requires a particular blend of affect and cognition" that oscillates between attempting to see and understand the other while undergoing self-examination (Gruen, 2015, p. 66). Like Kaplan, Gruen argues that empathy can be applied to larger social issues. Ideally, entangled empathy can help us to look at the structural causes of injustice and negotiate "our actions within complex networks of power and privilege" (p. 94).

The faces of addiction

In his series *The Faces of Addiction* (2011–2015), Chris Arnade, a former Wall Street trader, photographed drug users in the impoverished Hunts Point area of the Bronx in New York City. He took about 10,000 photographs and has posted 800–1000 online (interview, July 2016). Except to give copies to his subjects, Arnade rarely printed the photographs from *The Faces of Addiction*. They circulated primarily online, particularly on social media sites, including Flickr, Tumblr, Facebook, and Twitter.

His subjects are women, sex workers, and precariously-housed people of various races and ethnic backgrounds. Most have a history of abuse, neglect, incarceration and poverty. Some of the photographs are portraits. Others depict scenes from the daily lives of his subjects. His goal was that the photographs remain personal and depict individual lives, while the relentless repetition of similar stories shows how pervasive the issue is, marking addiction as a social and political dilemma (interview, 2016). Through his photographic work, Arnade learned that drug addiction is often the result of poverty, and almost always a symptom of abuse (Arnade, 2016a). This point of view shapes his written oeuvre: social inequality and class division cause suffering that leads to addiction (2017a, Arnade, 2016b). At the same time Arnade (2013) asserts that members of all social strata and races use drugs to "fight their demons" (para. 13). On the whole, Arnade finds fault with the social rather than the personal, and his photography aims to uncover structural inequalities through the examination of individual lives. As Gruen notes, entangled empathy can be used to reveal and challenge structural inequalities if, in practice, empathy is used as a process of understanding.

Bourgois and Schonberg write that photographs of drug users need to be contextualized with text lest they be misunderstood (2002). While it is impossible to limit the meaning of photographs as they circulate on social media, Arnade attempts to control the meaning of his photographs through captions. In photographing drug users, Arnade's agenda is to elicit empathy from viewers by showing them what they might not ordinarily see (interview, July 2016). The photographic captions demonstrate that he wants to humanize a group that is often judged and overlooked, and to show the kinds of damage and suffering that drug addiction can cause, especially within the context of a culture that criminalizes it. For example, Arnade (2015a) regularly photographed Shelly, whom he describes as a 39-year-old transwoman who has been living on the streets, supporting herself with sex work and struggling with addictions since she was 16. One of the most popular photographs of Shelly on Flickr was taken on August 26, 2012 in her living space under a bridge (Fig. 1). The first line of the caption states: "When my father dies I will go to his funeral, only to make sure he is really dead" (Arnade, 2012). The rest of the caption describes Shelly's abuse and the consequences of it, in both Arnade and Shelly's words.

The caption situates drug use within abuse (her father was "'strung out on drugs, and abusive'"), poverty ("…evicted from a house where they were squatting") and environment ("'[t]his place [Hunt's Point] is hell'"), which suits Arnade's analysis of structural inequalities (Arnade, 2012, para. 2, 4, 5). It also allows for the practice of entangled empathy. The caption provides information about Shelly – her "backstory" – which allows viewers who are open to empathic engagement to connect with her. The photograph depicts Shelly sitting on an old camp chair in front of a makeshift table that holds bright, potted flowers. Her pose couldn't be described as open because her arms and legs are crossed, but she looks comfortable and smiles directly at the camera. There are a number of empty seats behind her, and, using imagination to understand her environment, viewers could sit with her and imagine her experience: the flowers and furniture depict a desire and attempt to make a home, even in unusual, or what some might feel as untenable circumstances. This might be a point of connection for viewers leading to empathic engagement.

As of March 16, 2018, the photograph of Shelly in her "living room" has 584,687 views, 85 faves and 23 comments. Aside from those who praise the photographer for his work, viewers appear to have connected more strongly with the words in the caption than with the image itself, bolstering the notion that the image-text relationship is important for situating the photograph and its meaning. While some of the comments are unkind, some show interest in Shelly and her situation. Helly26 (2018) connects Shelly's life to their own in two posts: "A small space I once had and i made it as nice as can be with what little i had……..its important to have somewhere, no matter how small, or whatever, to call home….Bless you…." and "Been sober now for a while and with

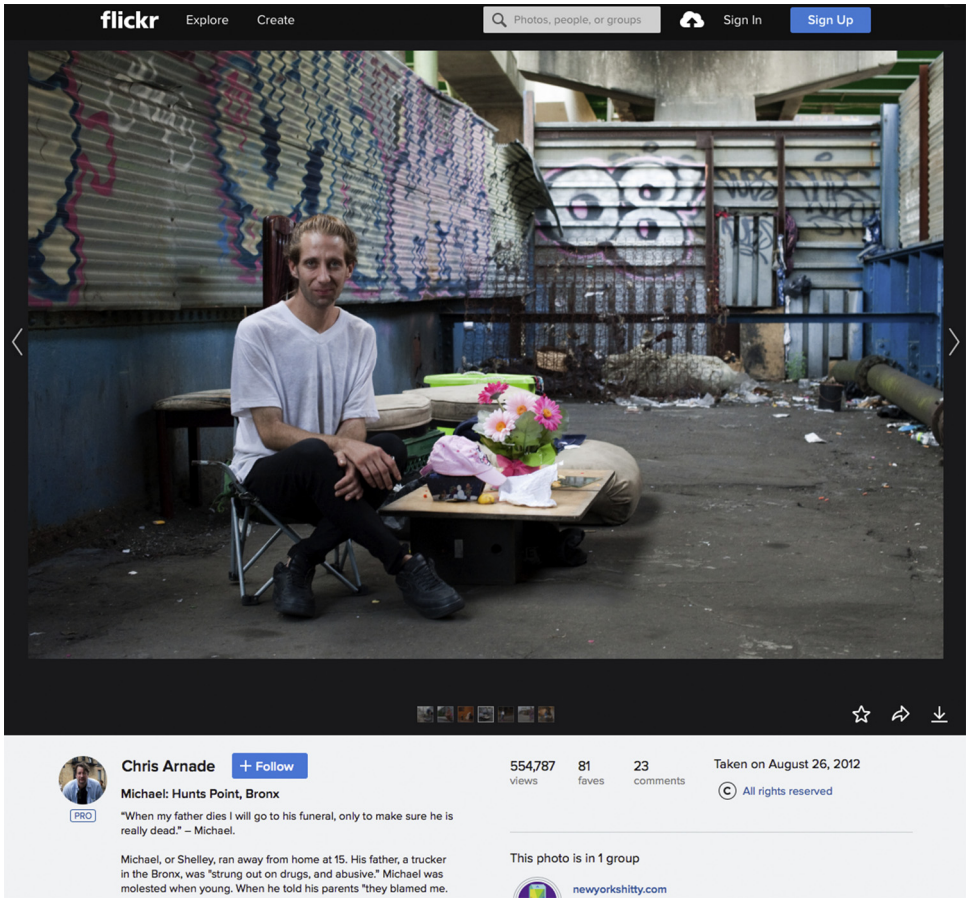

Fig. 1. Chris Arnade. "Michael: Hunts Point, Bronx." *Faces of Addiction* on flickr.com. Taken on August 26, 2012. Screenshot from. Published with permission of the artist. ©Chris Arnade.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/arnade/7857266704/in/album-72157627894114489/

that came a real home i can call my own…". The viewer appears to use both the photograph and the caption to begin to understand Shelly's experience. They then compare it to their own experience. This back and forth is part of the process of entangled empathy for it views the other in relation to the self. Another viewer, victoria edwards (2013), shares how the photograph has helped improve her own life: "…I had relapsed on Heroin and literally five minutes later after shooting I came across these pictures. It helped get me back on track. It took me back to the reality of where I used to be. His picture very well could've saved my life. Please let him know there are people who understand, who know what that misery feels like, and that my heart hurts so fucking bad for him its unreal, and I know that none of that is going to make it any better." Because she has intimate experience as a fellow drug user, edwards is more easily able to empathise with Shelly and acts by speaking to her directly in her post. She communicates her helplessness, but she shares that she understands. Edwards also acknowledges the power of community on the internet: that seeing someone in a situation similar to her own helped her. Thus, there are two kinds of empathy operating through the viewer's comments: empathy for the self and empathy for the other.

Even more so than Flickr, Facebook invites conversation about the photographs and the people depicted in them. Arnade posted about 800 photographs on Facebook, posting most frequently between 2012 and 2015. Many of them depicted Shelly in various circumstances that, together, provide a more nuanced picture of addiction and poverty in Hunts Point, NY, and of her life and experience.

Some of Arnade's earlier photographs of Shelly depict her using drugs and could be described as sensational. Two paired photographs ("Ritual of Drugs" and "Ritual of Drugs 2"), posted on December 13 and 14, 2013, picture Shelly in the dark space of "the cave," another temporary living space. In the first, she prepares drugs by candlelight; in the second, she smokes crack, her face and hand lit by a white light of unknown source. Both are profile shots. The highlighted face emerging from the darkness is familiar from art history, and these photographs are reminiscent of Caravaggio's Baroque paintings. Like Caravaggio, the lighting dramatizes the subject and her actions. In the first, the golden light highlights the first two fingers of her right hand, which is delicately engaged in a task that is mostly shielded by her left hand. A third photograph, "One hour to comfort," posted on July 26, 2014, uses the same technique of closely-cropped figure in profile lit against a black space. It depicts Shelly injecting into her forearm. While these are beautiful images that attract the viewer via aesthetics, an important first step that drives empathy, they are potentially troubling.

Fitzgerald (2002, 2015) asks us to consider the potential damaging and de-humanizing effects of re-enforcing stereotypes about drug users through photography. Viewed on their own, away from other photographs of Shelly, these might seem like unkind, voyeuristic photographs. For Fitzgerald, injection scenes such as this mark the *photographer* as authentic due to their "proximity to the action" (2015, p. 94), but the "erasure of the face of drug users," which occurs often in drug photography, removes the user's identity and potential for subjectivity (p. 89). This, of course, would be anti-empathetic, foreclosing connection. Yet viewers *do* connect with Shelly in these photographs. Her face is not erased, and she does not become the "modern primitive" that, Fitzgerald argues, is created by photographers like Larry Clark who do show faces (2002; 2015). Drug photographers can "homogenise the subject as 'not me' and thus a certain safety of distanciation can occur between the reader/watcher and the subject." (2002, p. 374). But,

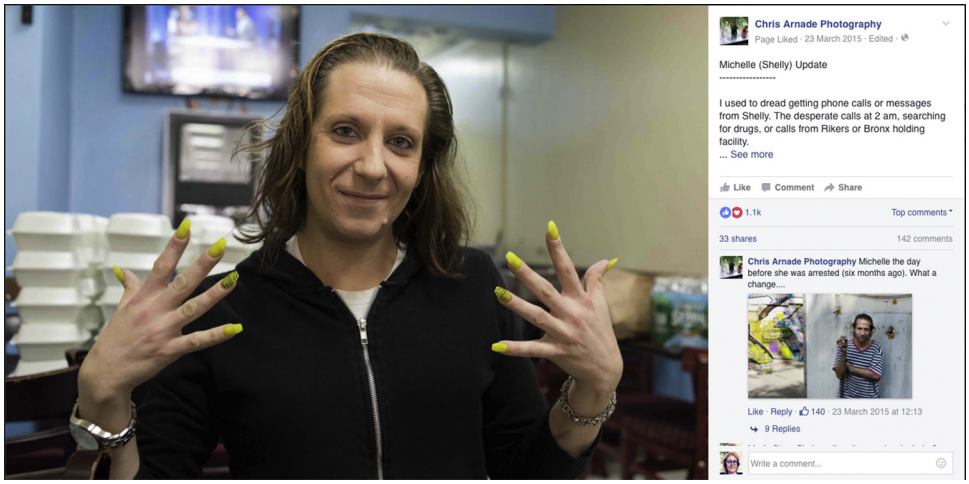

Fig. 2. Chris Arnade. "Michelle (Shelly) Update." *Chris Arnade Photography* on Facebook.com. March 23, 2015. Screenshot from post since removed. Published with permission of the artist. ©Chris Arnade.

many viewers react to the photographs of Shelly ingesting drugs with comments that display attempts to understand her context, and some are moved to action: "Life would be so much safer, more dignified with safe injecting sites" (Shelly, 2014) and "with you all the way Shaun. God willing we'll get something right." (Gerardy, 2014). These comments supporting harm reduction indicate knowledge about Shelly's circumstances gained from the photographs and captions (depiction of unsafe, precarious spaces for drug use) and empathy for those circumstances.

Readers of the Facebook page repeatedly asked for updates about Shelly when she was in rehab. For example, one post (Arnade, 2015b) that linked to Arnade's (2015a) guardian.com article features more photographs of Shelly, such as one where she shows off her florescent nails (Fig. 2). Her pose and demeanor evoke a playfulness that we do not often see in the sensationalized photographs of so-called addicts. Many of the comments on this post are thoughtful and compassionate. Several state that they will send cards or letters (Arnade facilitated this). Others offer words of encouragement: "I'm so happy for her. Chris please tell Michelle to keep going and never look back!!!! She can do it!!!! (Brown, 2015). At one point, Arnade set up a gofundme account to raise the small amount of money needed to pay tuition at cosmetology school. The Facebook page rallied those who wanted to help individuals negatively affected by drug use.

While they did not eliminate voyeurism, the circulation of photographs on Arnade's Facebook and Flickr pages opened spaces for those who have been touched by addiction to connect with the figures depicted in the photographs as well as with other viewers. For example, commenting on "Ritual of Drugs, 2" on Facebook, Kellogg (2013) wrote: "…it takes me back to my homeless days, my drug days and brings out the memories I have deliberately hidden away in hopes of forgetting…though…remembering them is safe and I can smile, nod and understand with out judgment." (2013).

Arnade admitted to removing personal attacks from his Facebook page, but noted that most of the comments on the photographs were balanced (email correspondence, August 25, 2016). While this makes a complete analysis difficult, and Arnade's photographs cannot encourage all viewers to react with empathy, some of the comments reveal that the photographs encouraged practices of entangled empathy.

Live through this

Tony Fouhse is a professional Canadian portrait photographer, whose practice includes commercial and artistic work. While some of his photographs are available online, most are disseminated through book projects and gallery exhibitions. His commercial work appears in many magazines and newspapers. Some of his photographic series are available on his website (https://www.tonyfoto.com).

Live Through This, 2012, is a photographic project in which he photographed Stephanie MacDonald's struggles with drug use, addiction, a major health crisis, and attempts to get into rehab. MacDonald is a young woman he met while working on *USER: portraits of crack addicts*, 2007–2010, in Ottawa's Lowertown. The end result of the project was a book, attributed to both Fohuse and MacDonald, with his photographs and her words, and an exhibition of his photographs at Carleton University Art Gallery, Canada, January 14-March 17, 2013.

The limited-edition book project marks the photographs as "art," for it presents them in isolation without captions. Marketed as rare and produced in two formats, regular and special edition (limited to 23), the book was carefully packaged in an aesthetically pleasing manner. There is an emphasis on the object (the book, the prints in the exhibition, the ephemera that came with the limited edition) that is not present in Arnade's work. Indeed, in this project, Fouhse's work emphasizes the photograph as a material object. Fouhse also emphasizes storytelling and narrative. Organized chronologically, the book *Live Through This* takes us through the harrowing, devastating, ultimately hopeful, and admittedly intriguing story of MacDonald's struggle with drug addiction.

The first set of photographs depicts MacDonald's daily life, including shots of her living space. A still life depicting her prized single room at Bridgit's Place (Fouhse & MacDonald, 2012) pictures a series of objects including makeup, a wallet, a syringe, a small notebook, a pill, a powder puff, all strewn across a pink sheet in the lower third of the image (Fig. 3). The next shows "Steph," as Fouhse calls her, standing in front of a flowered sheet hung on the door, arms at her side, wearing yoga pants (Fig. 4). With an ambiguous expression, she looks directly at the photographer displaying the "strength and soul in her face" that made Fouhse want to work with her (Barnard, 2013, para. 8).

By showing us Steph in her living space, Fouhse creates a character that viewers come to know, setting them up for the more graphic photographs that follow. This narrative strategy enables the potential for connection, although whether viewers connect depends on their circumstances, experience, and beliefs about drug use and addiction. Thus, the photographs and the book layout straddle tensions implicit in drug photography, such as "stigmatizing and revealing," and "fomenting voyeurism and promoting empathy" (Schonberg & Bourgois, 2002, p. 15). By beginning with less graphic photographs, Fouhse diminishes the potential for sensationalism and the often-callous judgment that comes with it.

Many of the photographs focus on Steph's body, particularly her skin, which is a familiar but troubling trope in the representation of

Fig. 3. Tony Fouhse. Untitled photograph printed in Tony Fouhse and Stephanie MacDonald. 2012. *Live Through This*. Ottawa: Straylight Press. Published with permission of the artist. ©Tony Fouhse.

addiction. If it weren't for the scabs and marks that cover her face, she could be any other young woman, ready for a yoga class or coffee date. As stated earlier, the notion of addiction is fraught and difficult to define (Keane, 2002). And if we accept addiction as "emergent, multiple in its realities and constituted through specific practices," it becomes more difficult to pin down (Pienaar et al. 2015, p. 501). Because addiction is essentially invisible, photographers make it manifest by focusing on the body as the site of visibility, whereby "skin functions as a means to communicate the subject's state of *being addicted*" (Skelly, 2018, p. 205).

Turning the page, there is a photograph that is more difficult to take in: a closely-cropped profile shot depicting McDonald in the same room, injecting into her neck. It is difficult to look at this image closely, yet there is something quiet and gentle about it. We enter a woman's private space, a familiar trope in visual representation, as she is engaged in an activity that takes all her concentration. Yet, it is an unambiguously difficult and controversial photograph. As Schonberg and Bourgois write about a similar photograph, "[v]iewers might react solely with disgust and only see self-destructive social pathology" (2002). This risks invoking a moralising, judgmental public. Were this photograph of MacDonald to circulate on social media, what kind of invective would it draw from commenters?

Three years earlier, "wondering if it's 'shock value' outweighs what [he saw] in it, namely, it's beauty, intimacy and intensity," Fouhse posted this photograph on his blog and asked readers for feedback (Fouhse, 2010a). While shocking, for some viewers, the photograph also had value, defined in the comments as "heavy emotion" and "something so human" (c.riley, 2010), "honesty" (jan, 2010), "show [ing] her as a real person" (Nat, 2010), "the product of your compassion" (Kate, 2010), having "incredible historical value" (Patrick, 2010), "leav[ing] me pensive" (van Leeuwen, 2010), "brings a human condition and a reality to the words addiction and/or addict" (Esposito,

Fig. 4. Tony Fouhse. Untitled photograph printed in Tony Fouhse and Stephanie MacDonald. 2012. *Live Through This*. Ottawa: Straylight Press. Published with permission of the artist. ©Tony Fouhse.

2010), and that it "shine[s] with compassion" (McN, 2010). Some viewers found the photographs he took immediately after she withdrew the needle to be more powerful (Simon, 2010; McN, 2010). Still other viewers find more compassion here than in other examples of drug photography (Chad, 2010; Kate, 2010; Nat, 2010). It is impossible to know whether that sense of compassion derives solely from the photograph or from following Fouhse and his work on his blog.

The next seventeen pages depict MacDonald's daily life: in her small room, preparing drugs, nodding off, sleeping, standing outdoors. MacDonald's words appear on a few of the pages, in a photograph of a letter she wrote describing the violent death of an acquaintance, or transcribed into type, telling us about her move to Ottawa, the loneliness, and the easy availability of drugs. In some ways, her words echo those of a worker who has moved away from family to a place where jobs are promised yet never delivered. This combination of MacDonald's words and Fouhse's photographs create a space where empathy is possible. Rather than depict addiction as weakness or as glamourous "heroin chic" (Hickman, 2002; Rosser 2010; Wood 2013), the photographs highlight the traumas that might accompany it. Yet, the way in which they tell the story is ambiguous. Captions do not tell

Fig. 5. Tony Fouhse. Untitled photograph printed in Tony Fouhse and Stephanie MacDonald. 2012. *Live Through This*. Ottawa: Straylight Press. Published with permission of the artist. ©Tony Fouhse.

viewers what to think or see; the viewer is entreated to reverie and the kind of thought patterns that allow empathy to emerge.

Subsequent groups of photographs in the book take the reader through MacDonald's health crisis. Days before she was to enter a rehab program, she ended up in the hospital with a deadly abscess in her brain. After surgery, she refused to stay in the hospital. Instead, she stayed with Fouhse and his wife. There are photographs of her in their home, sleeping and resting mostly, recovering from brain surgery and withdrawing from physical addiction. The book ends with photographs of MacDonald back home in New Brunswick (Fig. 5).

Fouhse's aim was not to convince the public to help PWID or to examine the structural problems that created or supported addiction. For him, the photographs were clearly enmeshed in discourses of art. The ostensible subject of this work, Fouhse claims, is himself: "Part of what a lot of my work is to go up to moral and ethical boundaries and exploring how a person might react. In this case, I guess the person is me" (Voyer, 2013, para.10). As is evidenced by the blog discussion about the photograph of Steph injecting in her neck, Fouhse's photographs are intended less for sharing information and more for aesthetic contemplation. The project and its material form tend to invite solitary

reflection over time rather than immediate action. This aesthetic function connects with the origins of the word "empathy" in aesthetic philosophy. Fouhse actively created photographs that attempted to show the "loneliness" and "isolation" MacDonald experienced as well as the "very real, very charged and very dramatic situation" that was their relationship: "I wanted to point to the fact that it was Stephanie and me in this together. My visibility in the photographs was meant to be understood rather than pointed out." (Voyer, 2013, para.13).

The relationship between Fouhse and his subject becomes apparent through the course of the book. Despite the unequal power dynamics that Fouhse readily admits (interview, 2016), the photographs are more than they seem, for each documents an unseen negotiation and consent. The photographs are not snapshots. They are staged collaborations between Fouhse and MacDonald (Fouhse, interview, 2016; Hiltz, 2013; Voyer, 2013). Fouhse did not circulate them without MacDonald's consent (Fouhse 2010b). Conversation, staging, negotiation, and consent in a project that unfolds over time is a fruitful place to consider entangled empathy. As Gruen notes, trust is an integral part of its process. Neither photographer nor subject knew what the relationship would bring, and each was intrigued by the other. MacDonald approached Fouhse initially (MacDonald, 2012). As Fouhse notes in a video where MacDonald interviews him, "…it was like a train that couldn't be stopped" (Fouhse, 2011). We might consider the book as the narrative of entangled empathy that was an integral part of the project. This would make viewers as witnesses to a relationship. This, in turn, might help them to see marginalized people differently.

Discussion

By integrating the subject's words or direction with the photographs, both photographic projects engage with their subjects' agency in ways that enact empathy. The question of agency in concerned documentary photographs is complex. However, here, I take agency to mean that the photographic subjects are participants rather than objects in the making of the photograph. As Kelly Wood notes in her article about Lincoln Clarkes' photographs of women in the Downtown East Side of Vancouver, many critics claim that vulnerable subjects are unable to give permission to be photographed (Wood, 2013). This understanding of photography derives from the very real unequal power relations between photographer and subject, something that Fouhse claims is inevitable (Fouhse, interview, 2016). The photographer, he asserts, always has the power. That the photographer has more power does not necessarily mean, however, that the subject has *no* power or agency. While both Arnade and Fouhse readily admit to directing their subjects, both explain that they also take direction from their photographic subjects. It is important to note as well, that artists are not subject to the same ethics as photojournalism. Art is always protected as creative expression. As Wood claims, photographs that "participat[e] in unequal power relations" "are not morally bad" (Wood, 2013, p. 237). The key is to acknowledge those power relations.

Acknowledging power relations is key in the process of entangled empathy. As middle-aged white men photographing vulnerable people who identify as female, we could read Arnade and Fouhse's work within a savior discourse. That is to say, the photographs (and by extension, the photographers) can be seen to "rescue" vulnerable subjects from life-threatening situations. While the photographs do, at times, show elements of this, they are more nuanced and complex than that. The articulation of empathy in these photographic projects is unsettled. In interviews, both photographers described the emotional toll of the projects. For Fouhse, allowing Stephanie to move into his home was not born of a desire to rescue someone from the streets; it came from the moral dilemma of not wanting to let her die, which, in Fouhse's opinion is what would have happened had he not taken her in (interview, 2016). Arnade did not want the late-night phone calls and "drama" that goes with attempts to support those who are struggling with addiction (interview, 2016). Yet, both responded with empathy all the while learning how to police their own boundaries through the process. It is here in these relationships that ethics and empathy become entangled. Both photographers weighed their subject's circumstances and "directed" their "empathic attunement… towards the wellbeing of another" (Gruen, 2015, p. 45).

The strength of Arnade's project is in its capacity to form empathic communities online. By sharing on social media, rather than presenting his work in the traditional venues for either art photography (galleries or books) or photojournalism (newspapers, magazines, books), Arnade encouraged audience participation and created communities. These communities include many people who would not typically go to art galleries or purchase art books and who might have "personal connections to addiction" (Arnade, interview, 2016). This means that the photographs not only reach a larger audience, but an audience outside the confines of the discourse of "art" and closer to the subjects he depicts in the photographs. The act of sharing opens the potential for entangled empathy by encouraging viewers to comment on the work. Several of the comments depict the kind of self-reflection and connection that entangled empathy requires. Many viewers reacted to Shelly's attempts to "get clean" with empathy and encouragement. Viewers often reacted by sharing their stories of addiction, and many contacted Arnade to tell him their stories. There were enough of these instances that Arnade started a series of posts called "Addiction Mondays" and "Recovery Wednesdays" where he would post stories about viewers' experiences with addiction, poverty, recovery, relapse, etc. This kind of community and the exchanges within it arose due to the sharing of his photographs on social media.

The strength of Fouhse's work lies in its ability to create an open narrative that encourages contemplation. Where Arnade's photographs rarely appear without text, Fouhse's are presented on blank pages. Captions, as Roland Barthes claimed, anchor a photograph's meaning (Barthes, 1987). Unanchored and open, yet staged and dramatic, Fouhse's photographs encourage readers to daydream, contemplate and imagine. They are not told what to think, and he does not have an explicit political agenda in creating this work. As Gruen (2015) explains, imagination is key for empathic understanding, whether the other we consider is in front of us or represented. "Storied empathy," or the ability to connect when the object of empathy isn't present, appears in childhood (p. 47). In drawing on narrative, Fouhse's photographs enact a literary form that is well documented to have an impact on empathic development.

Echoing a technique employed by Victorian writers, both Arnade and Fouhse engage viewers by focusing on one person's story rather than on an entire group (Harrison, 2014). Examining such photographic projects through the lens of entangled empathy reveals potential policy implications. Because they engage viewers via connection, photographs such as Fouhse's might garner public awareness about invisible issues making them more open to harm reduction strategies or other policies that improve the lives of PWID. Without the heavy-handedness of PSAs and the alarmist tone of many news media articles, Fouhse's art and open narrative encourage empathic engagement that allow viewers to take the time to contemplate rather than react, which, hopefully, allows them to truly engage beyond the individual story and consider how policies might impact the lives of PWID. Likewise, Arnade's photographs appear in a context that, while often hostile to PWID, manages to create connection and communities of sharing. Those who viewed the photographs of Shelly and read comments that shared other viewers' personal stories might, in an act of entangled empathy, be moved to consider the structural inequalities that impact people such as Shelly.

Conclusion

We are, as Jennifer Doyle writes, typically avoidant of difficult art (Doyle, 2013). Yet viewers continue to engage with photographs that depict difficult subject matter, such as in those of Arnade and Fouhse.

While an examination of the photographs as spectacle or voyeurism is outside the scope of this article, it is important to acknowledge those viewing patterns exist. Nonetheless, photographs also have the potential to be sites of empathy for marginalized people.

Declarations of interest

None.

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