These Photos Were My Life: understanding the impact of participatory photography projects.

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the impact of participatory photography as a tool for community development. In recent decades, participatory arts and media initiatives are increasingly agency rather than community led; their value assessed using linear evaluative models and framed in terms of short term, measurable, results. It is argued that these tendencies impede the potential critical contribution of participatory photography to social change processes and fail to capture important aspects of the psychosocial, political and subjective impact of projects. As a result projects struggle to prove their worth: the evidence base is weak and learning about the social reality of practice is hindered.

This article presents research on *Los Talleres de Fotografía Social* (TAFOS), a pioneering Peruvian community photography project, which demonstrates the enduring long-term impact that community led participatory photography projects can have on the critical consciousness of participants. Participatory photography is understood as an emergent process whose effects cannot be planned or predetermined but that rather needs to be understood in context, over time and from the subjective perspectives of participants. Discussing both the potential and the limitations of participatory photography, its uncertain contribution and the value of its open-ended effects within processes of nurtured emergent community development, this research contributes to literature pushing for a re-configuration in how we understand, capture and attribute the impact of participatory photography, and participatory arts and media more broadly, as a tools for social change

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Recent decades have seen community development workers increasingly harness participatory arts, media and culture as tools for social education, inclusion and empowerment (Mayo 2000) with approaches such as photovoice, digital storytelling and participatory video becoming popular as methods for research and community participation. Advocates argue participatory arts and media projects empower and 'give voice' to participants enabling people to become more engaged, confident, active and employable and increasing community identity, capacity and cohesion (Kay 2000). However despite their increasing usage and a substantial literature that reviews and assesses the transformative impact of participatory arts and media[1] the actual evidence of their social impact is 'paltry' (Belfiore 2002:94) and evaluation methodologies are still unsatisfactory (Belfiore 2002; Catalani & Minkler 2010).

This article presents research on participatory photography's long-term impact as a tool for community development and questions how we evaluate, quantify and frame the value and impact of these projects. It presents the findings of a research film, *These Photos Were My Life*, produced by the author that explores the long-term significance of *Los Talleres de Fotografía Social* (TAFOS), for 10 of its participants 15-20 years after their initial involvement. TAFOS was a pioneering 'social' photography project that armed over 270 Peruvian community photographers with cameras from 1986-98 over the years of Peru's bloody internal conflict (TAFOS 2006).

This research addresses important gaps in the evidence base. Participatory photography, alongside the wider family of participatory visual, arts and media methodologies, has been driven by an empowerment narrative evidenced by a growing body of correlating research that demonstrates the immediate and short-term personal self-developmental benefits of projects [2]. However there is a scarcity of research that identifies long-term impact and that examines whether these 'empowering' benefits endure. The alleged life-changing effects of initiatives have to date been completely omitted from any form of monitoring and evaluation compounding critiques that highlight a tendency to exaggerate and insinuate, rather than substantiate, the impact and value of these interventions (Belfiore 2002).

These Photos Were my Life establishes that the 'empowering' benefits of participation in community photography programmes can and do endure. The testimonies of the former TAFOS photographers attest to the lasting influence of the project in shaping their work, outlook, sense of self and in fostering 'critical consciousness' (Freire 1973) years after the project end. Concurrently they attest to the limitations of such projects and the issue of their sustainability. Crucially, they raise the question of attribution: to what extent can such

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[1] Kay (2000) gives a useful summary but references include Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Merli 2002; Matarosso 1997, Newman et al 2003.

[2] See footnote 3 and Fairey 2015 for a summary and review of relevant literature

interventions lay claim to 'empowering' outcomes? The story of TAFOS and the testimonies of the TAFOS photographers demonstrate that its enduring impact derives not only from the capacity of the participatory photography process to catalyse and foment critical consciousness but is also linked to the potent political conditions in which the project took seed and to starting points, agency and will of the participants involved.

Much of the existing research uses evaluative regimes that rely on linear theories of change and focus on immediate, measurable results that fail to capture the open-ended, critical, political, dialogical and psychological component of participatory creative and communicatory experiences (Belfiore and Bennet 2007, Bishop 2012), their affect over time and their relation to context and agency. This research draws on theorists who, utlilising complexity theory, challenge the predictive logic that underpins the thinking of most funded development projects which makes linear assumptions about cause and effect relations and how change happens that are incongruent with social reality (Burns 2014). Recognising that social systems are complex, unpredictable and in constant flux and that change happens in non-linear patterns, the aim is to develop more meaningful understandings of how change occurs to underpin ongoing and future practice (Burns and Worsley 2015).

In this research, participatory photography is understood as being involved in processes of emergent and transformative, rather than projectable, change (Reeler 2007). Emergent change is not linear, it involves diverse contextual factors which all contribute to how and why change happens, interacting to create an unpredictable dynamic of change as becoming (Green 2008). Understanding processes of emergent change require a conception of causality that is plural and contextual rather than linear and successional. Conceiving of causality as emergent means acknowledging that elements can have complex effects at multiple levels, infusing areas and issues beyond their domain and then changing in response to these influences (Connolly 2005).   The relationship between participatory photography processes and their effects, rather than being direct and definitive are understood to be complex, unstable, fragile and personal, moulded and shaped by a large number of interconnected diverse factors. As a result causality may only be discerned by looking back rather than looking forward (Burns & Worsley 2015). TAFOS provides a unique opportunity to consider retrospectively the long-term impact of participatory photography interventions on participants, to build more nuanced understandings of the emergent processes in which projects are embedded and to develop learning on how projects can have enduring consequence (Bradbury and Reason 2006).

This research contributes to recent literature that seeks to re-configure how we conceive participatory visual, arts and media projects by moving beyond empowerment narratives that romanticise impact and simplify practice. Contemporary researchers describe a plural field of practice that is ethically complex, replete with tension and shaped by the ongoing negotiation of agendas that are often contrary and competing (Shaw 2012, Fairey 2015, Lykes 2010, Luttrell & Chalfen 2010). Initiatives are primarily agency rather than community led which can led to tokenistic processes that serve to support decision makers

agendas and undermine the radical potential of projects (Shaw 2012, Bishop 2012). Projects can disempower rather than empower by raising and failing to meet expectations and by silencing and appropriating rather than enabling voice (Foster Fishman et al 2005, Purcell 2009). Within environments that favour 'results-based' management practices, initiatives struggle to demonstrate their value and critical learning on their dynamics and effects is lost (Rooke 2014)

There is an urgent need to re-imagine the promise of participatory photography in order to bridge the gap between its idealised emancipatory discourse and the contested reality of practice (Fairey 2015, Shaw 2012). The aim of this research is to contribute towards building more complex, ethical and layered frameworks to understand the critical potential and limitations of participatory photography as a tool within processes of emergent change. The potency of these projects lies not always in clearly demonstrable, definitive outcomes but in their more ambiguous and uncertain capacity to, over time, impact people's critical consciousness and sense of personal and collective self.

TAFOS and *These Photos Were My Life*

> *'One of the ways to create a new social order in a fragmented country is for the people to re-build their image, their face, their words ... It was out of this drama and the need to recover their own image that the TAFOS project rose...'*
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> **TAFOS project statement**

TAFOS had organic roots. It started when Gregorio Condori, a campesino leader in Ocongate, a small village outside Cusco in the Peruvian highlands, asked Thomas Müller, a German photographer who was working there, if he could borrow a camera. Condori wanted to get photographic evidence to prove that a local judge had demanded a bribe from the community. Leading from this, Condori and Müller proposed that the village create a team of community photographers. This group became the first workshop of what became known as *Los Talleres de Fotografía Social* (TAFOS).

From the Ocongate workshop it snowballed and between 1986 until its closure 12 years later, TAFOS ran almost thirty photography workshops in 8 districts across Peru. By 1990 it had become a legally constituted institution, internationally funded and recognised, with a team of staff and a central and regional offices, drawing attention from intellectuals, galleries, publications and activists both within Peru and internationally. TAFOS worked with organisations active within the popular movement and armed over 270 people, across the country from urban barrios to isolated villages and mines, with cameras. These grassroots photographers shot over 4,200 rolls of black and white film and produced over 150,000 images (Llosa 2006) creating an archive that 'preserved the visual memory of 12 fundamental years' in the history of Peru (Pastor 2007). TAFOS came to an end in 1998 and its archive is now

housed at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP)[3]. Its images are widely regarded as central to the lexicon of Peruvian visual history[4].

Figure 1: A meeting of the Ocongate workshop, 1987 © Serapio Verduzco / TAFOS

Figure 2: TAFOS workshop wall newspaper in Alto Collana, Puna 1989
© Jacinto Chila / TAFOS

Figure 3: Demonstration by TAFOS workshop, Cusco 1989 © Renato Cahua / TAFOS

The socio-political context which gave rise to TAFOS is vital to understanding its long-term significance for the participants in this research. The project took place during one the most violent and desperate periods of Peruvian history (Starn et al 2005). Economic collapse meant the large majority of the country was living in dire and precarious circumstances. People grew increasingly discontent with traditional party politics and The Communist Party of Peru, better known as Sendero or The Shining Path, started to wage a revolutionary assault on the Peruvian state. Their terror tactics drastically affected the lives of many people. The government met the Shining Path with a fierce response. Security forces used 'disappearances' to instil fear and, much as their adversaries, employed murder, rape and intimidation in their quest to eliminate the rebels. Campesino communities found themselves stuck in the middle of two lethal forces with violence escalating as they retaliated and counter-retaliated against each other.

Juan Carlos Paucar, one of TAFOS's facilitators who now works as a taxi driver in Lima, explains that in this context photography and TAFOS's activities fulfilled a vital 'role of denouncement, to confront abuses and unjust situations' (JC.Paucar, 2011, interview, 4th June). Photography enabled a process of 'autoreconocimiento', of self-recognition, for those involved (Llosa 2006:40), a means of taking back control and reaffirming identity (TAFOS 2006). It enabled people "to build some sense of their own value so they could defend themselves against the terrorism of the Sendero on one side and the counter-terrorism from the military on the other" (A.Bungeroth, 2012, interview, 1st February).

These Photos Were My Life[5] is a non-linear research film which brings together the testimonies and images of 10 former participants reflecting on the impact TAFOS and of learning and working with photography on their lives. Produced by the author between 2011-13, through photo elicitation and semi-structured active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium 1995), the respondents discussed their memories of TAFOS, what they learnt and gained from the experience and whether it still had any influence in their lives.

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[3] Images and info on TAFOS can be seen on the archive website:
http://facultad.pucp.edu.pe/comunicaciones/tafos/tafos_project.htm

[4] For a detailed account of the TAFOS project and archive see Fairey 2016

[5] Available to view online at http://thesephotos.korsakow.tv/

Starting from a position that designates participatory photography practice as diverse, open-ended and unpredictable *These Photos Were My Life* pursues an evaluative framework that seeks to accommodate multiplicity, ambiguity and tension and that analyses impact in terms of contextual conditions, participants' starting positions and their subjective experience and meaning making. Working with biography is chosen as a strong alternative to assessing impact in terms of a simplistic cause and effect analysis (Reeler 2007). The challenge has been to facilitate, elicit and present narratives that accurately communicate the plural character of the TAFOS experience and its impact on participants.

Before we consider its findings in more detail, some important provisos. Firstly, over 270 photographers from all over Peru were involved in TAFOS. The sample of photographers interviewed is not proffered as being reflective of the experiences of all TAFOS participants. As Muller explains, for many photography did not have any long-term value.

> *'A campesino is not a photography aficionado. If it is no longer useful to them then they will stop using it. It is a simple thing. At the time of TAFOS it was very useful – to explain, to transmit, to be listened to and so that they could listen. But when the moment passed they put the camera down.'*
> *(T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3rd June).*

'Snowball' sampling was used to make contact with the former TAFOS participants (Morgan 2008) and those interviewed participated in the more accessible workshops in the urban centres of Cusco and Lima. Thus *These Photos Were My Life* should be understood in the context of research that has already established the huge variety in the levels of participation in these kinds of projects and that concludes that the greatest impacts are felt by the most highly engaged (Catalani & Minkler 2010)

Secondly, counter to the participatory ethos in which this work is rooted, the focus of this research is primarily framed in terms of the individual participant experiences rather than its community dimension. The collective TAFOS experience is central to its story and the dialectic between the personal, collaborative and collective dimension is often referred to in participants accounts but a thorough retrospective investigation of the community experience was beyond the capacity of this independent researcher.

The lasting affect of TAFOS: 'getting to action' and critical consciousness

This section discusses the interviews contained in *These Photos Were My Life,* and is best understood in conjunction with viewing the short, non-linear film which is available online. Following the format of the film, interviewees are referred to by their first names. The former TAFOS participants speak of TAFOS primarily in positive terms and emphasise the enduring transformative effect of their project on their lives. They describe their involvement as having developed their skills, capacities and sense of self; 'empowering' affects that they continued to benefit from years after the project end.

Figure 4. Maria looks at TAFOS images while being interviewed for These Photos Were My Life, 2011

The findings correlate with the existing evidence on the short-term self-developmental benefits of participatory arts that shows projects to increase self-esteem and self-confidence and result in positive relationships, improved communication skills and a better sense of community. Existing research highlights that projects with high levels of participation and empowerment often result in participants 'getting to action' and becoming 'agents for change' (Catalani & Minkler 2010). The TAFOS participants provide many examples of 'getting to action' linked to their participation in the project. The most conspicuous of these is the career pathways it created for some. Pablo currently works as a video editor, Walter as a photographer, Rosa as a curator and archivist, Raul spent ten years earning a living as a photographer. Of those interviewed, half went on to work or continued to engage in fields related to photography, community and communications work. All these people had been youths when they got involved in TAFOS and the skills they developed, the exposure and experience gained, had a defining influence on their career trajectories[6].

Research oriented towards evidencing demonstrable outcomes often highlights participants' skills acquisition and career development (see for example Gidley 2007). However when the 'getting to action' evidence criteria is expanded to include wider-ranging examples of how participants have acted as a result of the perspectives, sentiments and critical learning gained through their participation then we can build a more complex picture of long-term psychological and sociological impact.

Participants talked of how TAFOS influenced multiple areas of their lives, from how they chose to raise their children (Gloria) to how they consumed media (Justo), from the network of friends that had seen them through life (Raul, Rosa, Gloria) to their development of a spirituality and way of being in the world (Willy and Susana). They all highlighted, in diverse ways, how their experiences in TAFOS had impacted their way of thinking, engendering in them a critical way of looking at the world that was fundamental to their intellectual and political outlook. They described an experience that had encouraged them to observe, explore and question and that had instigated in them a critical engagement with the world that crystallised a sense of social justice and purpose that was accompanying them through their lives. Justo described how photography 'helped me to understand things that I did not understand before'. Gloria spoke of it in terms of a sensitization to the world, 'that sensitivity that I gained from taking photos I took it and put it into other things… it meant I could no longer be indifferent, I had to get involved' (Gloria). She says it is an outlook that she has cultivated in her children. German talked of how taking pictures opened his eyes and gave him a way of looking at society.

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[6] This is mirrored in contemporary long-term participatory photography projects were there are plenty of examples of participants who have gone onto develop careers in photography and related careers (See Fairey 2015 for examples of projects such as FotoKids, PhotoVoice, Shoot Back, Kids With Cameras and Out of Focus).

Their descriptions relate to a concept of empowerment as enshrined in Paulo Freire's notion of critical consciousness (1970). Friere's concept is synonymous with theories of empowerment and participation and his dialogical teaching methods are foundational to many concepts of grassroots social change (Mayo 2000, Chambers 1997) and inform much of the theory behind participatory photography methods (Carlson et al 2006). The Brazilian educationalist was concerned with the process by which the individual through dialogue 'develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world' (Freire 1970:64). In participatory photography it is through learning photography, observing the world, deciding what pictures to take, editing your images, discussing and reflecting on them in a group, sharing them with others and presenting them publically that dialogue and ultimately transformation is initiated. Social power is cultivated by opening up an environment for dialogue and providing a framework for participants to think critically about their lives (Shaw 2012).

Justo describes this sense of an awakening critical consciousness as he found himself looking around more, noticing things he had previously just walked by; 'I would go to bed thinking of images… it helped me to look beyond… to be more analytical, more critical to not jump to conclusions' (Justo). Susana reflects that it it pushed her out on to the streets, got her talking to people and looking at the world around her. She felt compelled to photograph everything that caught her interest and has done to the present day, amassing a huge personal archive of images. She explains how 'through the images you make its like you are making an auto-critique of yourself, your life and the world around you' (Susana).

Each participant came to TAFOS from their own unique starting point, at specific points in their personal histories, and this had implications for its effect on their lives. For those who were already politically engaged such as Willy, photography provided a channel for all the pent up frustration and anger he felt regarding the political situation in Peru. It gave him a means to protest and denounce which he believes prevented him from resorting to violence; 'photography gave us a means to locate ourselves in times of such great upheaval' (Willy). For Maria, who worked as a community activist, it gave her an instrument to record, communicate and push for community issues but it also revitalised and renewed her resolve as it came at a point when she was demoralised and struggling to raise her children on her own. Raul describes how photography provided him with a vital tool; it became not only a means of earning a living but a 'feeling'; the camera acting as a kind of diary.

Evident from their testimonies is how the experience was not just about the taking of photographs but also it was the talking about, sharing, editing and displaying their images that was vital. The photographs themselves acted as a stimulus and catalyst to discussion that reflected the participants and community back on itself (Lykes 2010, Wheeler 2011). Willy speaks of photography as allowing him to theorise. Justo speaks of images as having given him a means to think and a way to ask questions. The sense is of photography as fostering deep reflection and a nascent criticality, an element critical to a process of empowerment. It evokes a notion of photography as becoming (Fairey 2015);

a notion of photography as tied to a process of emergent self-definition and politics that involves 'a certain form of human being-with-others' (Azoulay 2012:18) and the development of a new mode of citizenship (Wheeler 2011).

Limitations of impact: the question of sustainability

The interviews also raised important issues relating to the limitations of the project impact. Two participants spoke of their on-going desire to take images but their inability to do so due to financial circumstances (Maria) and lack of purpose and structure (German). 'If I had a camera I would have taken pictures of all the projects I have been involved with since then' (Maria). Others expressed their disappointment at the project end and their on-going desire that it had been able to continue (Rosa, Justo, German, Willy). Justo lamented that there was no organisation currently in existence through which he could channel his aspirations and realise his desire to teach and work with photography.

Various participatory photography studies and resources raise the issue of project sustainability in relation to impact and highlight participants' disillusionment when project activities come to an end (PhotoVoice 2009, Purcell 2009, Strack et al 2010). The recurring theme is that projects have the potential to create a negative outcomes by raising hopes, igniting aspirations and expectations for change, but failing to fulfil them. Deep bonds and friendships are often formed that can leave a hole when projects come to an end (Orton 2002). TAFOS, as an organisation, lasted twelve years, which is significantly longer than the majority of participatory photography initiatives. However, its closure disappointed many (Colunge 2008).

Experienced practitioners emphasise that long-term commitment to projects is not only central to maximising and deepening impact but also a crucial ethical matter (Fairey 2015). While the issue of project duration is not clear-cut – a long project does not guarantee increased impact – there is growing recognition that it is of key consequence to the quality and level of participation achieved (Catalani & Minkler 2010). The matter of a project's end is always going to place limits on and influence the nature of its impact. For Shaw there is an ethical imperative to avoid short-term projects that tend to be output focused and to re-envisage practice as a longer-term emergent process (2014). The question that remains is how such extended projects can be supported and embedded within the nurtured emergent development work described by Burns and Worsley (2015)?

German's interview also points to the limits of what a photography project can achieve when there are other needs and priorities to be addressed. He observes that despite his good intention and desire to continue with his photography and related activities that society 'absorbed him' (German). The reality of quotidian life and needing to earn a living had to take priority. It was not that the project failed or left him disempowered but that his responsibilities moved on and he no longer had the time or capacity to participate.

The crucial point is that 'global patterns of economic, political and social inequality are not going to be resolved by cultural strategies alone' (Mayo 2000:192). Many projects, absorbed in their own advocacy, fail to acknowledge the limits of what can be achieved through participatory arts strategies and to recognise that the parameters of what is possible is tied to the wider context and systems in which the project and its participants exist. TAFOS demonstrates that when projects are embedded within wider movements seeking structural and systemic change, that while participants may not be able to sustain their participation unsupported their images can continue to play a role in making visible alternative narratives and stories, amplifying community voices, documenting concerns and imaging new futures. TAFOS images continue to circulate and be used within social justice work in Peru almost 20 years after the project end (Fairey 2015). However when participatory photography interventions are delivered as isolated short-term initiatives their impact is limited.

How we attribute impact: contextual conditions

It is key that we develop a more nuanced understanding of how contextual conditions determine constraints and potential in participatory photography practice (Shaw 2014). Linear evaluation models focus on the specific intervention and seek to establish definitive relationships between the 'project' itself and its outcomes or effects at the cost of developing an understanding about how impact is shaped by context. They assume a direct link between photography, the process of being 'empowered' and the positive social change that results from it and often rely on versions of before and after measurement tools to demonstrate impact. However being able to show change in relation to a predefined indicator does not prove that the change was produced by the project being evaluated (Belfiore 2002). This was something that was inherently understood at TAFOS. Müller, its founder, argues that TAFOS has never claimed to have made impact on its own, 'we would not have known how to' (T.Müller, 2011, interview, June 4th). TAFOS's raison d'etre came from the part it played within the wider network of organisations and activities that made up Peru's thriving popular movement at the time (Starn 2005). It located its activities within this broader network, seeing itself as a project of 'accompaniment and support' (Pastor 2007:3) to the associations fighting for structural change in Peru. The photographer-TAFOS-local organisation dynamic was the backbone of the TAFOS endeavour (Llosa 2005). There was no assumption that the photography or TAFOS instigated change in and of itself.

TAFOS's legacy cannot be understood apart from the socio-political context and atmosphere that it grew out of. Müller explains that the project emerged and thrived because it began in response to a great necessity felt by those ordinary Peruvians who, struggling to survive with severe economic hardship, political violence and conflict,

> '...had a deep-felt need to communicate, to leave the isolation in their minds, in their forests, in their barrios and to say, 'Carajo, this is me and I am proud of it. I do not want to be manipulated.' (T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3rd June)

Embedded within a wider grassroots movement, the activity of the TAFOS photographers and the images they produced developed collective meaning and significance beyond the workshops being used in national and international platforms and Peru's own subsequent truth and reconciliation processes. This enlarged the project's influence and the participant's experiences. Its impact endured in part because it was part of a much bigger story and movement for change.

Emergent processes, dependent as they are on contextual conditions, cannot necessarily be replicated. The same intervention can have markedly different effects when rolled out in different times and places. Müller says that he has been asked countless times by NGOs to come and 'do a TAFOS' in other places but this misunderstands the ethos of the project; it is not something that can be organised and directed from above but rather that has to arise out of grassroots conditions and needs, 'you cannot re-create, what we had given to us' (T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3rd June). Working from this basis the purpose of evaluation becomes less an exercise in trying to prove definitive impact against baseline indicators and develop replicable project models but rather an inquiry into what the project did and did not make possible within the given circumstances and an analysis of the learning gained on process and principles that have implications for wider practice.

How we attribute impact: agency and subjective experience

Ultimately the significance, attribution or longevity of change is a matter of judgment and within evaluation cultures the question of who decides what change is considered significant and how they attribute that change is fundamental (Roche 2001). Rosa's interview gives invaluable insight on the question of impact. It further challenges evaluation models that seek to define impact in terms of project interventions and raises the question of the role of personal agency in emergent and transformative processes.

Rosa got involved with TAFOS through her youth group in the barrio of El Agustino in Lima. Twenty six years on she works freelance as a photographer, archive consultant and curator, skills that she first learnt as a TAFOS photographer and working in the TAFOS office. Rosa was one of the most active members of TAFOS's El Agustino workshop until an incident with the police meant she stopped photographing. During evictions by authorities in her barrio, police used a photo Rosa had taken as evidence to accuse her of being involved in terrorism. She was cleared but the incident scared her and she did not touch a camera for a number of years. However when she was offered a job to photograph a human rights event through TAFOS she took it. From there she got involved managing the restoration of the TAFOS archive while pursuing her own photographic work once more. Thorough TAFOS she then secured a scholarship to study photography in Barcelona. By the time Rosa returned TAFOS had closed down but she continued to work, freelancing as a photographer, archivist and curator; a career that has sustained her to this day.

Listening to Rosa's story it would seem reasonable to assume the considerable impact that photography and TAFOS had in shaping the course of her life. But for Rosa it is not so clear-cut,

> *'I don't know if it was the photography and TAFOS that were the vehicle which made me who I am today or if I had the predisposition to be who I am…' (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview)*

She explains that she always had diverse interests and was open to many things; it was just that photography was the easiest and most viable route. For Rosa, it is presumptuous to assume that a photography project was the greatest influence on her life and to locate and define her in those terms (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, June 4th). As she sees it there has to be an openness to change, an interest and a will to make the most of what is available. While 'photography can make things visible and act as a catalyst we cannot presume it is the reason for change' (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, June 16th).

> *'I think it depends on your character, on your interests to grab those opportunities. I feel it has been like that for me. I have taken the opportunities I have seen. I have tried and what remains for me is the photography' (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, June 4th)*

Casual evaluation regimes have led to a situation that exaggerates the importance of the intervention and diminishes the role of other factors, 'not least people's own ingenuity and agency' (Roche 2001:367). Yet Rosa's narrative echoes other research that questions whether there might be some who were more predisposed and receptive to the photovoice process than others (Foster-Fishman et al 2005). TAFOS as a project did not romanticise the capacity of photography and its own intervention to empower; 'Photography can help you to understand a situation but change happens according to the choice of every person' (JC.Paucar, 2011, interview June 5th). From such a perspective, the personal predisposition and will of participants becomes crucial to defining, understanding and determining impact.

Conclusion: Reframing how we evaluate and understand the impact of participatory photography projects

This research examined whether there was enduring consequence for project participants (Bradbury and Reason 2001) of participatory photography projects. *These Photos Were My Life* and the experience of TAFOS both ratifies and undermines the idea of a photography that 'empowers'. The picture that emerges is of the significant but uncertain potential of participatory photography to act as a catalyst and tool for critical consciousness. Uncertain because its impact is subjective and dependent on context, conditions and the agency of those involved but significant because as a tool for nurturing critical consciousness and developing a critical sense of self its emergent and transformative impact can endure and be felt over decades.

Re-conceptualising participatory photography as an emergent rather than a projectable process is vital if we are to develop more nuanced understandings of the social reality of projects and their effects. Contemporary participatory

photography narratives tends towards a rhetoric that mythologizes and simplifies the power of photography to empower but it is time to temper our romanticism. The image itself cannot create a possibility that otherwise does not exist (Campbell 2003). It is the relationships and dialogue formed through the image-making, viewing and sharing processes that are central.   Reeler emphasises that the real work of emergent processes lies in building identity, relationships and leadership - things that cannot be projected, predetermined, planned or guaranteed (2007).

Conceiving of participatory photography processes as emergent has significant implications for impact assessment and how projects are planned, delivered and evaluated. Emergent outcomes require emergent logic evaluation models where impact is assessed alongside the decisions made and learning generated during the course of the intervention (Burns 2014). Ongoing and integrated evaluation becomes an integral part of the project design, delivery and action learning process (Reeler 2007). Impact is not assessed in relation to a pre-determined theory of change rather theories of change are generated iteratively at every deliberate stage of the process; process and content must be meticulously documented (Burns 2014).

A re-configured approach acknowledges how much is still unknown about how people interact with, communicate with and are affected by images.   It remains uncertain about the nature of projects and their impact while recognising that there is little space for such an 'ethics of doubt' in competitive funding contexts that demand quantifiable results (Rooke 2014). Once we reconstruct our ideas of what constitutes as evidence and pursue methods that allow us to capture the cognitive, emotional, sociological and subjective elements of people's experiences it becomes clear that we must let go of the idea that the value of these projects can ever be definitively 'proved' (Belfiore 2007). Long-term reflection is vital to build critical learning and inform on-going and future work.

Despite the fact that many did not continue with their photography, TAFOS facilitated the critical consciousness of participants in a way that has continued to figure in their lives for decades after. Susana talks of it as a 'lifestyle' that has stayed with her forever. Photography as a participatory tool allows for the enactment of a new form of civil relations because it links people and their capacity for political imagination (Azoulay 2012). Projects that enable people to self-represent, to create new narratives, to strive for recognition, to think critically about their place in the world and to challenge and re-imagine politics are central to wider strategies of social change. However in terms of impact, whatever practitioners might aspire to achieve, the crux of what is possible lies not within the participatory photography method but with how the project is connected to wider strategies for social change, with the people who participate, how they chose to put it to work and with the systemic and contextual conditions that enable or constrain them.

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