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20 April 2024

REPETITION, MOVEMENT AND THE VISUAL ONTOGRAPHIES OF URBAN REPHOTOGRAPHY: LEARNING FROM SMOKE (1995)

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ABSTRACT

Engaging with a scene of the iconic movie Smoke (by Wayne Wang, 1995) in which a rephotographic project is sensitively elicited, this paper addresses the technique of repeat photography to contribute to methodological debates that have arisen within the nascent 'Mobility and Humanities' subfield. Through a humanistic perspective, the paper reviews and expands the nexus between mobility, photography and the urban by comparing the technique with three methodological issues: the blurring of supposed binaries, such as traditional/innovative, static/moving and fast/slow; the possibility of grasping the mobilities of the world in a post-human vein; and the opportunity to also consider techniques as sites for reflection. To address these issues, the paper draws from philosophies of movement, post-phenomenological and object-oriented stances and visual and urban cultural geographies. With reference to the urban realm, this paper proposes three perspectives on rephotography, namely (1) rephotography as a practice of slow and rhythmic attunement with circumstantial spacetimes moving backwards and forwards; (2) rephotography as a visual ontography that displaces the human and opens up space for the apprehension of the agency and mobility of things; and (3) rephotography as a continual process of activation of moving gazes on cities and their imaginaries.

KEYWORDS

Mobility and humanities; repetition; rephotography; urban photography; object-oriented philosophy

Introduction

This paper reflects on the potential of repeat photography, or rephotography, for the investigation and conceptualisation of mobilities in urban studies. It discusses how rephotography elicits aware-ness of the multiplicity of rhythms giving form to urban life, allowing one to slowly attune with movements, flows and circumstances; it shows how rephotography is sensitive to the more-than-human sphere and offers peculiar ways of sensing and presenting the urban. The paper proposes that the aesthetic process of rephotography, rather than providing a visualisation of unfolding movements in space, offers rhythmic visions of place. Moving across spatiotemporal perspectives, rephotography entails a practice of slow, repetitious attunement. The paper is grounded in the analysis of a central scene from the celebrated 1995 film Smoke by Wayne Wang. Based on a novel and screenplay by Paul Auster, the movie is set in New York and focuses on the stories of characters hanging around a Brooklyn tobacco store. The owner of the shop, Auggie Wren, portrayed by Harvey Keitel, carries out a personal rephotography project centred on the street corner where his shop is located. In a crucial scene, Auggie describes to the other protagonist, the writer Paul Benjamin, portrayed by William Hurt, that he takes a photograph of his store from across the street at 8:00 a.m. every morning (Figure 1). When showing his photographs, Auggie explicitly reflects on his personal rephotography exercise.

Drawing from dialogues and stills of this iconic movie from the 1990s, the paper addresses the technique of repeat photography in relation to the nascent 'Mobility and Humanities' subfield (Merriman and Pearce 2017) as an attempt to bridge mobility thinking with debates and approaches that characterise arts and humanities, including engagements with artistic representations of movement or philosophical readings of movement and flow. Although similar perspectives surely characterise several contributions in the broad field of mobilities, beyond a specific reference to arts and humanities (Myers 2011), their explicit recognition allows – among other things – approaches that are sensitive to how movement is enabled, felt, perceived, expressed, metred, choreographed and desired.

Embracing a humanistic perspective, Merriman (2014) posed some crucial questions and cautions concerning several methodological cruxes, such as the supposed emergence of mobile methods directly from the new-mobilities paradigm, the imperative for the mobility researcher to move with the researched subjects/objects and the emphasis on technologically enhanced techniques. Conversely, Merriman saw the need to recognise the long history of methodologies dealing with movement – from textual analysis to archival research, oral histories to non-mobile ethnographies, painting to photography, etc. – thereby enlarging creative experimentation with a plurality of traditional and non-traditional methods and techniques. By engaging this debate and focusing on the technique of repeat photography, we will address three open methodological issues.

First, Merriman (2014) highlights that mobile methods – with a primary role played by video methods – are often considered to be ways of moving with, chasing and capturing that 'foster forms of knowing or understanding which are either obscured or erased by traditional methodological techniques' for representing actions and events. By introducing past and current developments in rephotography practices and confronting them with other visual tools used in connection with mobility research, we will consider it to be a unique technique that has the potential to destabilise conventional dichotomies such as traditional/innovative, past/ongoing, static/moving, fast/slow, passive/active, desk-based/field-based, continual/changing, mediated/lived and representational/ non-representational, and to achieve 'slow' attunement with circumstances, contingencies, bodies and rhythms.

Figure 1. Auggie rephotographing his corner shop every morning at 8 a.m.; one of the pages of his albums filled with rephotographs; Paul looking at Auggie's rephotography project. (Scenes from the film Smoke, 1995).

Second, Merriman (2014) notes that innovative mobile methods frequently tend to focus on mobile subjects, while paying less attention to materialities, spaces and infrastructures, thereby revealing a human-centred character. When referring to the Actor-Network Theory and the post-human advocacy for a democracy extended to things, Merriman (2014, 78) suggests that 'few mobility scholars have attempted to utilise mobile (or static) methods to produce the kinds of symmetrical sociologies that have been advanced by scholars in Science and Technology Studies'. As a result, the invitation to acknowledge that 'things move' and that this requires consideration of the varied qualities, speeds, rhythms and affects of the 'mobilities of the world' (Merriman 2014, 178; see also Jensen 2016). In a similar vein, by adopting a post-phenomenological and object-oriented stance, we address rephotography as a technique that offers visual ontographies of mobilities. If ontology refers to the nature of being, ontography concerns descriptions of the emergence of being (Brown et al. 2019). The phrase 'visual ontography' is drawn from Bogost's (2012, 45) work on alien phenomenologies, where he proposes practical ways of being attuned to the life of things, including an object-oriented poetics of photography. We suggest that rephotography may be considered an empirical and poetic strategy for tracing the ways mobilities draw in materialities and contingencies and how these moments rhythmically articulate.

Third, according to Merriman, it is important to consider the methods and techniques for the study of mobility as sites for reflection and as experiences and processes in themselves, rather than mere tools for gathering data. Through a close reading of the scene where the protagonist of Smoke elicits his own rephotographic act, we will provide a reflexive account on the practices, experiences and emotions of rephotographing human and non-human urban worlds. In this way, we will not only deal with what rephotography produces in terms of urban accounts, but we will also further reflect on the peculiarities of this technique and the potential thereof for the apprehension of multiple mobilities of the urban realm.

These methodological issues will be addressed through literature reviews, theoretical reasoning and engaging with various scenes from the film Smoke that offer important elements for our reflection on rephotography. First of all, the film is an emotionally intense and evocative piece of art, which arguably helped to enliven our text. Smoke is one of the most iconic accounts of rephotography in popular culture, as attested by a number of journal articles that continue to be published in recent years, which mention, for example, tourists and fans who still hang around and take photos of the corner between Third Street and Seventh Avenue in Brooklyn, where a tobacco shop never really existed.[1] The analysis also allows perspectives from urban studies to be introduced and suggests alternative views on 'urban mobilities' (Jensen et al. 2020). In fact, the scene situates rephotography in specific spacetimes of the post-industrial city; this entails a fetishistic celebration – as in many other New York movies – of the neighbourhood as a monument and 'authentic' site of collective performance (Stein 2019), as well as a romantic vision of the community as being made up of face-to-face encounters that generate eccentric stories (Peacock 2014).

It should be emphasised that the focus of this article is not an analysis of the film in a strict sense, and the scene is intended as a way of giving empirical and methodological focus to the argument. Stimulated by Deleuze (1986), it can be argued that the paper does not engage with conceptualisations 'on' the movie but 'alongside' it, insisting on resonance, encounter and invention rather than reflection, capture and representation. Inspired by Clarke and Doel (1997), the paper tries to resonate productively with the rephotography inherent to Smoke, with the analysis of the scene of the film setting in motion thoughts and different conceptualisations of rephotography. A similar stance also characterises smoke as a pervasive and evocative presence. According to Paul Auster, the title of the film refers to the store and 'also to the way smoke can obscure things and make them illegible. Smoke is something that is never fixed and that is constantly changing shape. [. . .] Smoke signals [. . .] smoke screens [. . .] smoke drifting through the air'

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[1] See for example S. Dollar, 'The Brooklyn Cigar Shop That Never Was', *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 December 2011; https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204026804577100500821824184 (accessed 11 April 2020).

(Insodorf 2013, 60). In a similar way, in this article, the film is characterised as a palpable-but-light presence that moves all over the text and blurs academic perspectives, changes styles and provides empirical focus. Hence, the analysis ought not be framed as an example of cultural studies, but rather as a fluid attempt to indulge with fragments, vignettes, suggestions and provocations to challenge the spatialities of an academic text (Ward 2014).

The paper is organised as follows. The following section introduces theoretical speculations concerning the nexus between photography and mobility to contextualise the consideration of rephotography in mobility research. Then, three sections focus on rephotography in relation to movement (I), the mobilisation of the non-human (II) and reflexive moving gazes (III). Under the influence of the film, these three sections deal with the urban realm, although our reflection is also aimed at illuminating the theoretical and methodological potential of rephotography within other realms. The concluding section summarises key arguments and circles back to Merriman's three methodological propositions.

Expanding the photography and mobility nexus

Photography has been addressed and employed within mobility studies in many diverse ways. It has been seen as a technology that is co-evolving with certain kinds of mobilities; in particular, as a technology that objectifies landscape through the modern tourist gaze or alternatively stimulates embodied and performative engagements in the unfolding of tourism practices (Urry and Larsen 2011). Büscher (2006) discussed similar alternative conceptions in relation to mobile and embodied practices of professional vision and photography during landscape-change surveys. Analyses of photographic materials and applications of photographic methods are commonly found in the journal Mobilities (see Murray and Robertson 2020 for a recent example). Counteracting the idea that 'stillness is the primary characteristic of the photograph while movement is the sole prerogative of the viewers', Lisle (2011) suggested that contingent encounters 'pull the photograph into the embodied viewer, and the viewer into the material photograph', thereby producing 'photograph-viewer assemblages that are marked by both stillness and mobility'. More commonly, photography has been taken into consideration in both proactive or critical terms while facing the task or reflecting upon the capturing or freezing of mobility. In his classic On the Move, Cresswell (2006) considered late-nineteenth century photography as a technology employed to make movement legible. In a similar framework, Clarke and Doel (2007) explored the historical contacts between chrono-photography and early cinema. According to them, at the end of the 1890s, animated photography was concerned with the movement and pace of the city in the attempt to capture its 'true motion'; in contrast, early films engaged with modernity's 'vernacular relativity' through the techniques of montage, enabling filmmakers to re-engineer space and time, and ultimately, to rearticulate the world.

Such historical experiences, together with current experimentations of contemporary media, artistic practices and digital forms of moving stills, have been widely explored in media studies over the last fifteen years (see Green and Lowry 2006; Beckmann and Ma 2008; Hölzl 2011; Guido and Lugon 2012). These studies go well beyond the reduction of the still/moving dichotomy to the dominant forms of photography and film as they consider multiple combinations, such as photo-graph sequences and loops, slide shows, film stills, stop-motion, digital photo-animation, virtual scrolls, pans and zooms, movement blur, time-lapses and superimpositions.

As a consequence of the digital shift, in fact, the convergence of still and moving images has become pervasive in both amateur and professional domains. Challenging the traditional attribution of stillness and motion to different domains in logical progression (i.e. from photography to film), a new visual paradigm explores the 'different distribution of stillness and motion' within photographic images (Hölzl 2011, 2).

Through this lens, therefore, a growing body of literature is paying attention to historical hybrids, digitally re-mediated forms of obsolescent moving photo-graphic images, pervasive practices of digital post-production of photography and the everyday experience of dynamic effects in images that are unfolding within electronic screens; some examples include the Ken Burns animation effect, which was popularised by Apple iPhoto software; Adobe's Moving Still technology, which adds 3D-camera motion to still photos; or Deep Nostalgia, a video re-enactment technology which allows to animate faces in still photos in order to create realistic video footage.

Indeed, digital photographic practices and the use of camera-phone photography have often been thematised with respect to mobility and kinaesthetics (see for instance Frosh 2015; Larsen 2013), while attention has recently been given to image mobility and photography migrations (Zarzycka 2020). Hölzl (2011) states, 'movement is not an accidental aspect of photography' because it 'intervenes at every stage of photography' and is an assumption that resonates with current phenomenologically-oriented photographic theories that imply performative and consequent mobile dimensions (Iversen 2007). Writing in the journal Mobilities, Larsen (2008) similarly proposes a 'non-representational photography theory' for interpreting performative practices of digital tourist photography and related digital network flows.

Photography has also been linked to mobility studies through the practice of rhythmanalysis. Time and motion studies, in particular rhythm-geographies (Edensor 2010) – or the temporal understanding of places in their multiple and multi-scalar rhythms – have frequently suggested using a Lefebvrian rhythmanalysis as an investigative disposition. The conception of rhythm proposed by Lefebvre is inspired by a musical and mathematical understanding, insisting on ideas of repetition, return, cycle and measure. Lefebvre stressed the divergences between traditional and natural rhythms, and the linear repetitions imposed by the everyday life of the city and by the velocities of modernity, industrialisation, work and urbanisation (Lefebvre and Regulier 1992). Hence, rhythmanalysis has been proposed as an approach for thinking about space and time together in the study of everyday urban life. Still, it could be seen as more of 'an impressionistic phenomenology of the diverse temporalities of everyday urban life' (Highmore 2002, 174). For Lefebvre, rhythm is not limited to the social and the human: he considered a number of non-human rhythms, such as those enacted by trees, flowers, birds and insects (Lefebvre and Regulier 1992). Non-human objects and species that may appear immobile at first sight may simply be slow and disarticulated from the rhythms of our bodies. In this sense, rhythmanalysis is a quest for attunement with the multiple rhythms, movements and speeds shaping urban life (Highmore 2002; Marković 2019).

Although Lefebvre was sceptical about the possibility of capturing urban rhythms through images, some authors have performed rhythmanalysis by engaging with photographic techniques. For example, Simpson (2012) experimented with time-lapse photography to attend to the everyday rhythms of urban life and the dynamic temporal unfolding of urban space. More recently, in a comprehensive review of rhythmanalysis, Lyon (2019, 71) experiments with time-lapse photography, thereby suggesting that the rhythms of the analysed space were made more visible by increasing the speed of the images: 'losing the richness of the detail, [the viewers] sidestep the sensory overload that live presence and video entail, and begin to distinguish some threads.'

As we will see, while time-lapse shares the fundamental repetitious nature of repeat photography, it is different because it is typically used to 'produce the appearance of events unfolding at a faster pace than they actually occurred' (Simpson 2012, 430). Instead, repeat photography is commonly used to produce a gap between different temporal planes and activate a comparison between them in the form of a slow 'orchestration of relationships' (Highmore 2002, 190). Indeed, Lyon (2019, 92) mentions some works based on the juxtaposition, layering or superimposition of repeated photographs (Wunderlich 2013), but she feels that the freezing of time and the flows that these photographs provide, particularly when put together in a two-dimensional format, risks losing the capacity to provide an immersive and sensory experience of

movement. Compared to time-lapse photography, rephotography lacks a sense of rhythm and flow; as we will see, this is precisely where repeat photography distances itself from current mobile methodologies and visual methods that have been adopted to capture movement. Rather than providing a visualisation of rhythms or an unfolding of movement in place, rephotography provides rhythmic visions of a place. Rephotographic montages, and the generative possibilities by visual montage in general, offer different opportunities for capturing, evoking and presenting layers of temporalities (Uhl 2021). In fact, temporal gaps are rearticulated through rephotography montages to grasp patterns, rhythms and temporal movements.

When intended as a scientific method, repeat photography is primarily used within the geosciences and geomorphology to assess changes in the physical landscape (Cerney 2010); it basically serves as a comparison of successive images of a scene that were obtained from identical photo-point locations over a discrete period of time. However, repeat photography as a rigorous natural science method has been complemented by an array of more qualitative and diverse uses, thus originating the more variegated field of 'rephotography', which 'ranges from documentation of data to poetic expression' (Klett 2011, 114). In fact, rephotography has been employed in qualitative social sciences, education and the arts and humanities research (Metcalfe 2016; Rieger 2011; Finn et al. 2009; Méaux 2019) and implemented in many creative ways.[2] As McLeod (2019) explains, the prevalence of rephotography has recently increased in popular visual culture through an association with a plethora of visual practices and genres, such as 'before-and-after', 'then-and-now', 'ghosting' and 'superimposed photography' (Bear and Palmer Albers 2017; Munteán 2015). This recent surge in popularity of repeat-imagery and image layering within creative mass media, public institutions and intimate visual cultures is linked to the new digital habits of post-production photography and image sharing through social media platforms (Lewi and Murray 2020; Munteán 2016). The popularisation of rephotography brings with it the possibility of manipulating spacetime on different scales in a way that differs from – and conceptually precedes – the engineering of time and space allowed by filmic montage and other editing techniques (Clarke and Doel 2007). According to Kumar (2014), the new rephotographic practices 'exceed the [. . .] exclusively formalist focus on the accurate repetition and juxtaposition of views' and are 'directed towards an expansive mediation of the earlier views and their sites through the use of multimedia technologies and numerous additional materials.' With all their variations, remediations and 'imaginative ways of showing time', repeat-image methods range from corner-of-the-room perspectives to satellite views (e.g. the time-slider feature on Google Earth) (Daniels and Bartlein 2017, 31).

At the same time, the involvement of digital practices has made rephotography increasingly mobile; apps for mobile devices based on superimposition of past images to real-time views make the practice a navigational one (as in the case of the app Timera, released in 2013). Revisitations of practices such as the 'twin-time travelling', which was proposed by Kanasaka (2014) as a methodology to analyse sites that were described a century before by Victorian explorer Isabella Bird by detecting lines of continuity or variations in the landscape, could also be used as a form of mobile rephotography. Differently, Uhl (2021) engaged with de Certeau's idea of ambulatory logic by using walking and rephotography for the analysis of evolutionary patterns for the False Creek Flats neighbourhood in Vancouver. Significantly, while enacting creative psycho-geographic walking and photographing, Arnold (2019) experimented with repetitional and longitudinal photographic contacts with the city surface by taking repeated snaps of ephemeral (i.e. rhythmically erased or removed) urban street art and graffiti. Here, re-capturing is encountered when in motion, and temporal variations are perceived when walking and revisiting. Interestingly, it has been noted that current popularised rephotography enhances the ability of the still image to render the dynamic passing of time and produce animating effects on image archives (Lewi and Murray 2020).

We suggest, however, that rephotography is not mobile because it is increasingly embedded in mobile practices or because it provides animation effects; rather, it is mobile because its repetitional dimension

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[2] For examples: http://www.klettandwolfe.com (accessed 26 August 2020).

allows us to chart dynamic 'circumstantial spacetimes' (McCormack 2017), which relate to the rhythms and properties of human and non-human assemblages binding events into contextual, contingent and affective spatiotemporal dimensions that ultimately compose urban forms, fluctuations and spatiotemporal trajectories. Arguing for an understanding of worlds as circumstantial spacetimes, McCormack called for writing, thinking and performing as ways of cultivating modes to be attuned with and responsive to circumstantial spacetimes. Here, we pose the case of rephotography as one such way of attunement with a mobile inflection given by its rhythmic processuality. This paper illuminates the peculiar connections between the technique/genre of rephotography – or the act of rephotographing – and notions of movement, with a particular focus on the urban dimension, by providing a close reading of scenes taken from the film Smoke. Three types of rephotography are proposed in the pages that follow to discuss different perspectives of their relation to movement.

Rephotography I: slowness and repetition as movement of urban spacetimes

The film Smoke offers a perfect exemplification of the multiple relationships between repetitional and longitudinal photography, the city and the articulation of spacetime. In this sense, the analysis of the scene in which rephotography is enacted allows us to develop reflections on repeat photography as a visual technique for grasping and developing sensitivity towards urban rhythms, slowness and attunement.

As mentioned, in the film Smoke, the shop owner Auggie carries out a personal rephotography project. In the eyes of the author, Paul, who is struggling to write his next novel after experiencing the trauma of the premature death of his wife, this project configures itself as a creative one, which is unexpected from a character like Auggie. Despite his intellect, Paul does not immediately under-stand the purpose, style and intended meaning of Auggie's photographic work; yet with a few evocative words, Auggie guides the gaze of Paul through the pages of the albums that are filled with his rephotographs, and he also reveals his poetics as some essential features of the technique of rephotography.

> Paul: I didn't know you took pictures.
>
> Auggie: I guess you could call it a hobby. It only takes me five minutes a day but I do it every day, rain or shine, sleet or snow. Sort of like the postman.
>
> Paul: So you're not just some guy who pushes coins across the counter.
>
> Auggie: Well, that's what people see. That ain't necessarily what I am.
>
> Paul (looking at photographs): They're all the same.
>
> Auggie: That's right. More than 4,000 pictures of the same place, the corner of Third Street and Seventh Avenue at 8 a.m. 4,000 straight days in all kinds of weather. I can never take a vacation. I gotta be in my spot every morning. Every morning in the same spot, at the same time.
>
> Paul: I've never seen anything like this.
>
> Auggie: It's my project, what you'd call my life's work.
>
> Paul: It's amazing. I'm not sure I get it, though. What was it that gave you the idea to do this project?
>
> Auggie: I don't know. It just came to me.

Here, Auggie explains the rationale at the basis of his work by emphasising the repetitional coincidence of space (i.e. the 'same spot') and time (i.e. the 'same time') on which his project is based. These cyclical coincidences led him to produce 4,000 photos of the same urban frame, and thus a multitude of spatiotemporal layers that could be seen as 'circumstantial spacetimes'. As McCormack (2017) suggests, the notion of circumstantial spacetimes helps to consider the world as being created by contingencies, spatiotemporal frames and 'conditional constraints within which a sense of something happening emerges'. Hence, repeat photography is a technique that is particularly apt to 'slow down the circumstantial' and allow us to be 'tensed by worlds' (McCormack 2017, 10; Rossetto 2019). When occupying a specific vantage point again and again, the rephotographer activates an infrastructure of sensing that marks a coincidence (i.e. the same scene) but also a non-coincidence (i.e. an always-diverse scene), and thus a movement between different spatiotemporal contingencies.

Since rephotographies typically 'challenge historical distanciation because the "then" of past and the "now" of the present become entangled with one another' (Miles 2016, 65), rephotography has been particularly linked to practices and experiences of memory and spacetimes (Kalin 2013). In Auggie's intimate rephotography project, the suspension, the stretching and the desire to play or even control time is evident. According to Clarke and Doel (2007, 590), 'Auggie has been engaged in recording the potentiality of time: not times past but the passage of time; not spent moments but lived durations'. In the film, this is palpable in relation to the practice of taking and collecting photographs and in the act of showing them to Paul. Concerning the first aspect, Auggie stresses how he has to be physically present in the same spot and same hour every morning, regardless of weather or other conditions. Days and photographs easily become blurred and indistinct in time. The images he has collected over the years are organised in a linear timeline by the date of the shot being written above each image in his photo albums, and they are mapped in time by being placed in the correct order in his photo albums. In one scene, Auggie generously and intimately shares his map of contingent spacetimes with Paul:

> Paul: But . . . they're all the same!
>
> Auggie: They're all the same, but each one is different from every other one.

Auggie's words allow Paul, after some hesitation, to understand the spirit of the images and access an affective time-warp, or rather, an experience of time-suspension, by slowly turning the pages, an exercise that allows him to spot a picture of Ellen, the wife he lost (Figure 2). Paul is moved by suddenly encountering her figure in the photograph, while Auggie continuously moves his eyes between Paul and the image, as a display of co-presence in two different affective spacetimes. Paul is emotionally overwhelmed by this unexpected visual encounter that destabilises time, space, presences and absences, and he asks Auggie to accompany him on his visual journey:

> Paul: Jesus. Look. It's Ellen.
>
> Auggie: Yeah. That's her, all right. She's in quite a few from that year. Must have been on her way to work.
>
> Paul (whispering, before crying): That's Ellen. Look at her. Look at my sweet darling.

Figure 2. One of Auggie's rephotographs capturing Ellen, Paul's dead wife. (Still-frame from Smoke, 1995).

This scene proposes a fundamental tension between the imaginaries of fast movement, which characterise per se modernity and urban life, and the experiences of stillness that are enacted while both shooting and slowly comparing repeated images of those urban movements. Rather than immersing the viewer in urban movement in the acts of photographing and showing/viewing, these photographs allow for a slow attunement with diverse spatiotemporal contingencies in the city. Jarvis (2020) describes Smoke as a case of 'cinema of slowness', referring to an aesthetic sensibility that implicitly opposes the hegemony of speed and spectacle; by the use of stillness, silence or minimalist movements, the cinema of slowness provokes an artistic, evocative de-familiarisation of the everyday. In this sense, rephotography allows destabilising what has been described by Lefebvre as arrythmia – the hegemonic presence of linear, urban rhythmical patterns imposed by modernity over different ones, including the vernacularity and slowness of cyclical, natural processes. Rephotography offers possibilities for feeling certain rhythms and for seeking synchronicity and dissonance between the gaze of the artist/researcher and the unfolding of urban events and circumstances.

In the movie, the act of smoking is coherent with the orientation described above because it is implicitly slow, repetitive and discontinuous, interrupting the flow of dialogue in the scene. These days, smoking is a highly spatially regulated and stigmatised practice (Collins and Procter 2011), but at the same time, it is sensuous, affective, atmospheric and socially 'subversive' (Tan 2012). The act of smoking – with the cigarette being emblematic of modernity – involves a number of rhythms, comprising repetitive acts, pauses in daily performances, slowness, and bodily rhythmic cycles of nicotine levels (Marković 2019). Smoke and slowness are both therefore framed in the movie as forms of resistant rhythms that oppose hegemonic and normative forms of urban life.

> Auggie: Enjoy yourself while you can, Vin. They're gonna legislate us out of business.
>
> Vincent [the shop's former owner]: Yeah. They catch you smoking tobacco, they'll line you up against the wall and shoot you.
>
> Auggie: Tobacco today, sex tomorrow. In a few years, it'll be against the law to smile at strangers.

In Auggie's images, repetition generates a particular sense of slow movement that exceeds the mere charting of material transformation in time and the mere tracing of human flows in place. Rephotography allows Auggie to resist the pace of hegemonic gazes, and by embracing slowness and a certain idea of passivity (i.e. the lack of control over the composition of the image), he embraces the unpredictable and the unexpected while attending to the unfolding life of a city corner.

By charting spacetimes with repeated images, Auggie continuously and actively produces an array of potential temporal and spatial stories (Daniels and Bartlein 2017). The continuous repetitional movement of contingent spacetimes and the potential stories thereof gives form to Auggie's 'poetics of repetition' (Wennerscheid 2018). This practice of re-enactment, which is typical of rephotography (see Modrak 2011), incarnates a notion of repetition as motion, which can be traced back to Søren Kierkegaard. While exploring Kierkegaard's 1843 work Repetition, Carlisle (2005) suggested that for him 'repetition is a movement of becoming, of coming into existence'. While recollection refers to something finished, 'repetition means that a past actuality becomes actual once again': 'if something is repeated, it is re-enacted, actualized' (Carlisle 2005, 525). Carlisle thus points out how Kierkegaard connected the notion of repetition with the notion of kinesis, transition and movement as actualisation.

Furthermore, repetition is also configured as an existential 'inward movement: an intensification, a deepening, a kind of vibration, a movement on the spot', a kind of 'kinesis of the self' (Carlisle 2005, 528 and 535). These well-known transformative qualities of repetition were illustrated by Gilles Deleuze in his 1986 work Difference and Repetition, which strongly influenced other lines of thought on the powers of the repetitional in geography (McCormack 2015). A 'site for generation and transformation', repetition becomes productive in processes of 'looping back' and 'recollecting forwards' (Browne 2013, 906 and 912). In a similar vein, Auggie's practice is informed by a poetics of repetition 'as a dynamic with unpredictable effects' (Wennerscheid 2018, 383) in the backward and forward movements thereof. Although within the philosophies of repetition, the latter is often intended to be a style of thought, rather than a practice, rephotography, enriched by the idea that 'to repeat is to produce movement' (Wennerscheid 2018, 386), may be configured as both an attitude and a technique to be attuned to (slowly) moving spacetimes and open-ended past and future contingencies in the city.

Rephotography II: visual ontographies of the urban

Since the very first establishment of the new mobility paradigm, scholars have acknowledged the importance of materiality and the non-human (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006, 14–15). Calls for the study of non-human rhythms (Edensor 2010) have been followed by calls for extending rhythm analysis to non-human movements at the margins of human perception (Lyon 2019, 92–93). Being a technique that was mostly adopted in the natural and physical sciences, rephotography is, by definition, a genre that is implied in the recording of material non-human entities. Within physical geography, it has often been adopted to document landscape changes and provide a sense of movement of physical (e.g. geomorphological) features that is difficult to convey (Butler 1994). Scholarly applications of the technique in the urban context also focused on processes of urban change that are highly impactful on the material landscape, such as gentrification. Following Doucet (2019), despite the fact that rephotography is an under-utilised method for analysing urban transformations, 'it has the potential to give new empirical and theoretical meanings to our understanding of the ways in which major forces of change shape cities and their urban landscapes.'

When used in social sciences and above all art practices, urban rephotography, which has similarities to street photography, often becomes more attentive to the human component of the landscape. At first glance, this also seems to be the case with Auggie's personal project, which is more focused on human subjects and their

movements across a repeated frame, rather than on inanimate features. In a way, Auggie's work is presented as an inventive work of art, an original and free endeavour and a subject-centred intentional experience of place. This contrasts with the original script of the movie, in which Auggie refuses to be described as an artist and insists on the mechanical dimension of rephotography: 'Well, let's not exaggerate. I take pictures. You line up what you want in the viewfinder and click the shutter. No need to mess around with all that artisto crap' (Auster 2003, 35). Still, creative rephotographic practices as those enacted by Auggie have also been read as expressive and embodied strategies to generate auto-reflections about the relationship between subjects and landscape views (see Smith 2007).

> *Auggie: It's my corner, after all. It's just one little part of the world, but things take place there too, just like everywhere else. It's a record of my little spot.*
>
> *Paul: It's kind of overwhelming.*

It is important to notice that Auggie's rephotography puts much emphasis on the multiple rhythms and agencies of non-human elements. Auggie's elicitation of his rephotographs puts the complex intertwining of human and non-human things populating his angle in a new light, going beyond the mere documentation of dynamic transformations in the urban landscapes and the mere tracing of movements of the humans criss-crossing the street corner. Furthermore, his elicitation discloses the peculiar potentiality of repeat photography to present the rhythms, movements and agencies of non-humans.

> *Auggie: You got your bright mornings and dark mornings, summer light and autumn light. You got your weekdays and weekends. You got people in coats and galoshes, you got people in T-shirts and shorts. Sometimes the same people, sometimes different ones. The different ones become the same and the same ones disappear. The Earth revolves around the Sun. Every day the light from the Sun hits the Earth at a different angle.*

In general terms, openness to the non-human could be seen as a prerogative of every photo-graphic or cinematic act because their technologies indexically capture the presence of things. Despite being implicated – like every other photographic genre – in the irreducible dialectics between human agency and the agency of things, however, rephotography presents peculiar features that facilitate sensibility and attunement towards the agency of things (Rossetto 2019). The rules and compulsoriness of repeat photography (i.e. the same vantage point, frame and hour, in the specific case of Smoke) establish a situation in which the rephotographer creates the frame, but things actively create the contingent image-event. Every time rephotographers reach the vantage point, they do not know what they will find. They control the repetitional practice but cannot control the autonomous powers of the captured spacetimes. In fact, several of Auggie's pictures are characterised by the dominant presence of objects (an umbrella, a garbage truck); in some cases, these objects actively exclude human subjects from the gaze of the observer (is there someone behind the truck?), whereas some pictures simply lack a human presence. However, even more, the sense of repetition at the basis of rephotography is fully enacted by things proper: The buildings in the background, the traffic light, the light pole, the concrete of the street, and the sidewalk are the only elements that allow the viewer to figure out that all the pictures have been shot in the same place. Things also operate as autonomous agents by bursting into the process. Things are 'caught', which means that they actively appear in the images in a manner that exceeds the will of the rephotographer; they are captured with an intentional gesture, yet the assemblage of things in the picture does not follow human intentionality. Auggie's rephotographies present a strong idea of the ungraspable autonomous life of things, which is typically valued within object-oriented philosophy (Harman 2011).

Unsurprisingly, rephotography was taken into consideration by one of the major proponents of the philosophical current of object-oriented philosophy, Ian Bogost; in a video intervention (Bogost 2011, n.p.), he paralleled the rephotographies curated in the website dearphotograph. com to object-oriented ontology, recognising an object-orientation in this particular photographic practice: 'All the human memory and vulnerability and experience is still there, but with a strange loop that pulls inanimate things up to the level of human surfaces'. Like object-oriented photography, repeat photography implies a practice of learning how to orient ourselves towards objects. Following Bogost, it helps to see things in pictures; as suggested by Auggie, 'things happen there'. As Kalin (2013) notes when commenting upon Bogost's intervention, a 'logic of addition and coexistence encourages us to treat the rephotograph's ontology, or hauntology as flat.'

Rephotography accentuates the capacity to create visual ontographies that Bogost especially attributes to photographic poetics. In Alien Phenomenology, he proposes pragmatic forms of object-oriented thinking and calls for ontographic methods that have the potential to reveal 'the background noise of peripheral objects' (Bogost 2012, 32). Auggie's pictures, in this sense, compose a photographic ontography which draws 'attention to the countless things that litter our world unseen' and shows that things 'exist not just for us but also for themselves and for the one another, in ways that might surprise and dismay us' (Bogost 2012, 50–51). In this vein, we see a vivid application of a basic quality of rephotography that is the extroversion towards the unpredictable and excessive unfolding of the world of things in Auggie's poetics. Rephotographic framing is a human-driven practice, but it allows things to enter freely into the frame and time to speak alone.

A ray of light drops in and partly covers a couple in the foreground; a garbage trunk comes to occupy half of the image; a sudden pause in the flow of people gives room to the nude street corner (Figure 3). These are moments in Auggie's photographs in which we see the pulsating existence of the non-human. Here, we repetitively see not just bodies, flows and routines, but also objects, absences and contingencies. From this perspective, the rephotographic technique that was adopted by Auggie responds to McCormack (2015) in his call for minor experimentations aimed at 'turning things around: defamiliarizing them; placing them in generative juxtapositionings that allow thinking to grasp a sense of liveliness of the worlds of things anew, however modestly.' Significantly, McCormack (2015) values the act of repetition when endorsing a 'repeated, responsive attentiveness' that is enacted by 'responding to the gently interruptive, intrusive becoming present of the thing as it moves through and generates perturbations'.

Moreover, through this apprehension of the non-human, in our view, Auggie's photographs provide a visualisation of what Amin (2012) – reflecting on urban public space – calls an urban unconscious. From a post-humanist social perspective, Amin sees the material entanglement of human and non-human things (i.e. bodies, shared spaces, infrastructures, objects and technological intermediaries) at the base of a tacit, unconscious, pragmatic, mediated togetherness or a sense of co-existing in an urban material frame. Rephotography as a methodological device is coherent with this understanding of urban co-presence in a shared material space, which also offers an alternative conceptualisation of the sense of belonging to an urban community. In Auggie's rephotographic work, the street angle traversed by human and non-human entities originates neither a bond of identity nor a neutral space of flows. Rather, it consists of a material frame for shared existence. What the rephotographs give back is the idea of the urban fabric as a space between us – a 'relation of touch', a 'surface of contact' (Coward 2012, 469, 479) where bodies, objects and stories move in flat ontological planes, where pictures compose 'a record of my spot', as Auggie puts it. Amin contends that the urban materialities that constitute the frame of these flat ontological movements and collisions/encounters between human and non-human strangers often remain unconscious. Yet Auggie's work, and rephotography in general, with its repetitional insistence on the same frame, holds the potential to enhance sensitivity towards the agency of things and to give a sense to the viewer of the existence of a shared contact surface where humans and non-humans are co-present.

Figure 3. Seeing things in Auggie's rephotographies: a ray of light, a garbage truck, the empty street corner. (Stills from Smoke, 1995).

Rephotography III: moving gazes in ever-changing cities

This section introduces reflections on the contribution of rephotography to the practices of experience and representation of urban spaces. It focuses on the imaginary geographies of Brooklyn enacted and reproduced by Smoke, their relations with the 'real' Brooklyn, and the kind of active gaze that is demanded of the viewer.

While more rigorous, 'scientific' forms of repeat photography are aimed at assessing physical landscape change (e.g. fluvial, ice/mass movements or vegetation and land-use changes), urban rephotography can be seen as a subgenre of urban photography (Tormey 2013), which has been embraced by scholars, photographers, and more recently, by digital practitioners. Creative photo-graphic works (e.g. the 'Tracking Time' collections by Camilo José Vergara[3]); academic projects of re-photographic documentation (Thornbush and Thornbush 2014; Hansen and Flynn 2015; Doucet 2019; Uhl 2021); apps promoted by urban institutions, like the Streetmuseum augmented reality app of the Museum of London or the PastPort app in Melbourne[4]; and collections appearing in news-papers (Anella and Childs 2018) – all these applications demonstrate that repeat photography had, and continues to have, a fundamental role in charting cross-temporal changes of the urban land-scape and experiencing urban pasts that involved a range of different producers and publics, practices and languages and registers and attitudes.

As we have seen, urban landscape is crucial in Smoke, and the whole film may have been intended as a poetic celebration of street life and an imagined sense of busy community. According to Auster, 'The rest of the country perceives New York as a hellhole, but that's only one part of the story. I wanted to explore the other side of things in Smoke, to work against some of the stereotypes that people carry around about this place' (as quoted in Insodorf 2013, 62). The images in the pictures describe a place, its minute variations and its vibrant everyday banality, such as people changing the way they dress according to seasons or colours changing according to brightness. This piece of the city is described as a collective performance, a constantly-repeating, but ever-changing, landscape, and Auggie's rephotography exercise does not seem to have a clear reason, a logical direction or movement or an ending: 'it's my project, what you'd call my life's work'. He continues taking pictures, documenting, telling stories, living and experiencing the place in a tension between the generic banality of his images, and by extension, the banality of photography in our daily lives and the aesthetic singularity that turns them into peculiar objects. Auggie seems to be stuck in the place and blocked by his obsession with his life-project; he must be there every day. Rhythm is therefore a crucial element for becoming attuned to Auggie's rephotography practice, and arguably for the whole film (González 2009). However, the repetitional enactments of Auggie's frame can also be projected outside the story-world of the film, investing in the materialities of the 'real' city, and in this sense, it suggests the potential of rephotography not only as a representation device, a methodological tool, an artistic practice and an attunement strategy, but also for shaping urban space.

As has been mentioned, the place described in Smoke does not 'really' exist, which means, for example, that there is not, nor has there ever been, a tobacco shop at the corner of Third Street and Seventh Avenue. However, the corner still exists as a material urban space and as a narrative space within the film (and within Paul Auster's script) and within the emotional sphere of the audience. This plurality of planes-of-existence for the corner transforms it into a meaningful geographical space for explorations, encounters, imaginaries and tourist gazes. Several websites and journal articles describe this well-known sociocultural and spatial practice in relation to the film; for example, the corner is mentioned and discussed as a TripAdvisor spot[5]: fans search for the place and take photos of the spot, thereby re-enacting and enlivening the rephotography exercise proposed by Auggie. Furthermore, it is a way to move along the path described by Auggie, a way to

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[3] http://www.camilojosevergara.com (accessed 26 August 2020).
[4] https://youtu.be/qSfATEZiUYo and http://www.citizenheritage.com/pastport-app (accessed 26 August 2020).
[5] See note 1. See also http://www.themoviedistrict.com/smoke-1995 and https://www.tripadvisor.com/ ShowTopic-g60763-i5-k642153-The_Cigar_Shop_Corner_in_the_movie_SMOKE-New_York_City_New_York. html (accessed 26 August 2020).

engage with and continue his project, blurring the distinction between fiction and reality, passivity and activity, and – in the logic of this article – academic and non-academic approaches to a research topic and to writing. Before beginning to write this article, for example, Alberto Vanolo performed this tourist ritual by exploring the film location (Figure 4). By encountering the setting, his main emotions were displacement and disappointment. Not only were visual referents to the film's place limited, thereby causing him to ask, 'It this the right place?', but the whole atmosphere was different from the idealised scene sketched out in the movie. It looked like a banal place that was deprived of particular life, dynamism and excitement, at least when compared to the idealised and aestheticised representation of the movie. He could still recognise, however, that there was a layer of excitement simply for the reason of being there, and specifically, for the possibility of taking a picture of the place. The sensation is that the whole experience acquired a meaning through the act of re-enacting rephotography, and looking at Figure 4 today, ten years after the fact, enables us to engage in a playful kind of meta-rephotography within rephotography, a matryoshka of meanings and images that emphasises the potential of moving images across different times, narrative lines, emotional dimensions, scales and urban spaces. In this sense, rephotography entails a continuous and open-ended movement of gazes.

Figure 4. One of Auggie's rephotograph compared to a photo of the same location taken by Alberto Vanolo during a trip to New York city in 2010.

In his reading of Smoke, Frosh (1998) describes specific aspects of the visual mode – duration, mobility, concentration and context of presentation – that can fix and dissolve photographic resemblance in a tension between similarity (i.e. all the images look generically similar) and the marking of each photo as unrecoverable and vitally unique. This is done by describing the two distinct and parallel modes of viewing enacted by Paul: one that is glancing, distracted, fast and unfocused, and the other one that is concentrated, attentive and slow.

> Auggie: You'll never get it if you don't slow down, my friend.
>
> Paul: What do you mean?
>
> Auggie: I mean, you're going too fast. You're hardly even looking at the pictures.[. . .]
>
> Paul: Slow down, huh?
>
> Auggie: That's what I recommend. You know how it is. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow [. . .] Time creeps on its petty pace.

Through the words of Auggie and through the visual construction of the movie, Smoke accompanies both Paul and the spectators in moving their gaze and 'to reconstitute it around an altogether different space, the "space of exhibition", that is a type of viewing that is "fixed and fixated on the gallery wall"' (Frosh 1998, 324). This is enacted by a cinematic emulation of the museal and gallery framing by the lateral immobilisation of the vision of spectators over the images. They cannot simply move on to the next image, because their vision is compelled before the still. Still, relationships between and within gazes are not fixed; both the viewing subjects with their emotions and the urban landscape with its rhythms and vibrations are, in fact, always on the move. In this framework, the scene builds an ideal association between immobilisation and Auggie's poetics of repetition (i.e. the 'right way' to view the images), which is in opposition to Paul's initial distracted view, moving quickly from one image to the other. This duality of visual modalities in relation to mobilities may offer a meaningful contribution to urban studies, as rephotography suggests a certain attitude and a certain attentive way of looking at pictures.

Concluding remarks

The use of rephotographies and still images in movies like Smoke plays with convergences between photography and cinema and other forms of visual media. In Smoke, viewers are not sure that they are watching a movie, rather than looking at a picture – whether it is a motion picture without motion or a series of random shots from a webcam placed in Brooklyn. At the same time, Smoke reminds us that stasis in films is illusory because it is obtained through a series of identical, repeated images; such consideration may be extended to digital formats, as a still image in a streamed video is obtained from a continuous flux of data. However, there is more than repetition in Auggie's images: Suspended in motion, they animate the street corner and capture the pace of city life (Clarke and Doel 2007).

Smoke is not the first and not the only movie playing with still images, nor is it the first visual experiment that has dallied with repetition and variation. For example, Remes (2012) analyses the case of the 'cinema of stasis', a category of films in which there is little or no movement. According to Remes, such works reveal that time, not movement, is a crucial element when distinguishing cinema from photography. However, we can also think of other cultural references – the words of Auggie describing the Sun hitting Earth at a different angle every day, the changing colours in the photos and his daily commitment to the project recall Claude

Monet's poetics of repetition and his famous quote taken from a letter to a friend: 'Every day I discover more and more beautiful things' (Levine 1986).

Such suggestions may be innovatively mobilised in the field of human geography with reference to the continuous attempts to grasp, present and enliven the fluid, mobile, rhythmic, open-ended and always-in-becoming nature of space. Inspired by the work of Merriman (2014), we were confronted with three critical perspectives of mobile methodologies, and we discussed the ways in which rephotography relates to issues of representation, time, movement, rhythm, attunement, materiality, reflexivity and experience.

First, in our view, the sensitive use of rephotography may contribute to challenging the boundaries of mobility research, as rephotography may be usefully situated between methodological binaries. It blurs the tradition of photography and the newness of media technologies; it bridges representational and non-representational approaches; it combines bodily re-enactment and mediation; and it allows viewers to grasp a number of intermediate planes and trajectories that involve continuity and change, the self and the setting, and motion and immobility. With reference to the city, we argued that rather than only offering sequential visualisations of moving people in the urban scene, rephotography provides rhythmic visions of urban sites, activating a movement between different spatiotemporal contingencies. Thus, rather than immersing the viewer in the flow of urban movements, rephotography allows for a slow attunement with circumstantial spacetimes. While recognising the productive ways in which rephotography is increasingly embedded within mobile practices, we fundamentally value rephotography because it mobilises different spatiotemporal planes through a poetics of repetition as motion. As a dynamic with unexpected effects, rephotography may be used as a technique of repetitious attunement towards the past and the yet-to-come, producing an inward backward and forward movement of the immobile self.

Second, we argued for a privileged connection between rephotography and the aim of grasping the mobilities of the world. Rephotography is a subject-centred project; it is also an extroverted practice that distances the human and helps to embrace an object-orientation. Drawing from post-phenomenological and object-oriented philosophies, we suggest that rephotography is not only a method of documenting change but also a practice that is sensitive to the visual ontographies of human and non-human mobilities. By allowing ourselves to be tensed to the unpredictable unfolding of the world of things in urban sites, rephotography may be considered a strategy for raising awareness and for presenting the agency of things, and the existence of a shared contact surface where humans and non-humans are co-present and collide.

Third, we showed the potential of considering techniques for mobilities research as sites for reflection. We not only concentrated on what rephotography produces in terms of urban accounts but on what rephotography can generate on both the theoretical plane and in terms of urban practices. Indeed, Smoke provides a methodological reflection on rephotography and urban studies, and the nuanced and penetrating elicitations of the rephotographic act emerging from the film were evoked throughout the paper to stimulate a reflexive attitude on both the technique and the theorisation of movement. This reflexive perspective allowed for meta-considerations, projections inside and outside the film story-world and appreciation of the various movement of gazes that rephotography requires.

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