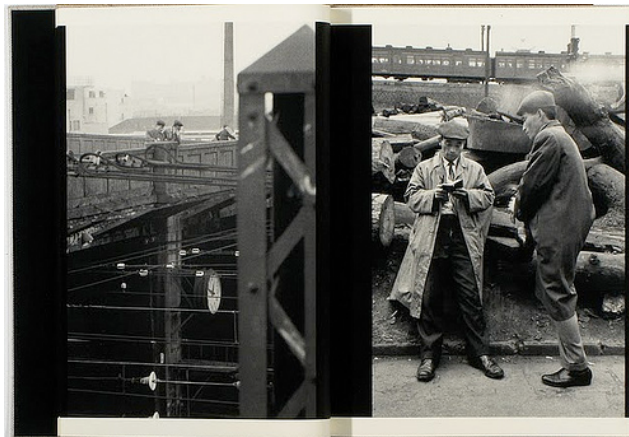


DER GREIF FOTOMAGAZIN

REMEMBER ME A STORY

My two favourite photo-books of last year represent two ends of a spectrum, but they merge in their dependence upon a collective memory, mediated through culture, of events never actually experienced.

A Criminal Investigation (Edition Xavier-Barral, 2011) is a nostalgia-laced, crime procedural using documentary (read: real, actual) images. To have found and assembled these images, and to have produced the book now, using images from many years ago, is almost too good to be true. The fact of its existence is a marvel. In 1958, photographer Watebe Yukuchi was given unprecedented access by the Japanese authorities to document the investigation of the »dismembered-corpse case« as it came to be known. The book compiles the images he took in procedural sequence, thorough and comprehensive in their scope and masterful in their depictions.



A Criminal Investigation (Edition Xavier-Barral, 2011)

The book has numerous appeals. The temporal displacement for one. The digging up of another great Japanese photo-book from that fertile period for another. The images are excellent, as is the printing and the presentation. The real magic, however, is conjured up by the fact that the book constitutes a 'real' cinematic narrative. It is a fictitious reality that effectively distills one of the elemental powers of the photographic series: the power to organise reality. One of the oldest genres, both in Literature and Film, and especially narratively, the 'whodunnit' often foregrounds the pleasure one takes from having the need to arrange random events into a cause and effect sequence. The magisterial Columbo aside (in which the killer is known to the viewer before the investigation) the resolution of the procedural satisfies because it restores a missing link to a causal chain of events; as do most narratives. Stories offer a way of seeing the world as sequential and therefore rational. Cinema has fulfilled this need for a long time, substituting for literature along the way, and in so doing associating certain types of imagery with certain types

of story. The role played by photography, though less obvious, is as influential but perhaps more in terms of style. The grainy, high contrast b/w stock with which the images in »A Criminal Investigation« have been taken, is of the kind that still connotes increased »realism«, despite the fact that almost any kind of imagery is now achievable. The book fits into the sub-genre of the »photo-novel«, mainly because of the volume images it contains, as well as its loose adherence to a 3 act narrative structure. With less images it would be a »photo-story« more appropriate to photo-journalism and the magazine spread. But to call it either is to ignore the act of documenting the events depicted. Experiences are only stories in retrospect, and often inaccurately so. Loosely connected whilst the photos are being taken, they become stories when the photos are sequenced. It is true that the great »photo-stories« will mix vantage point, using close-ups and long shots in the way that film would, as well as encourage identification with a central protagonist, but this is more reflective of an experienced photographers ability to pre-visualise his/her project's final outcome. In other words, a photographer will get as much as 'footage' as possible, in order to have as many options as possible with which to 'edit' said footage into a story. Bearing this in mind, might it not be more accurate to call the book a »photo-film«? Chris Marker would surely agree.



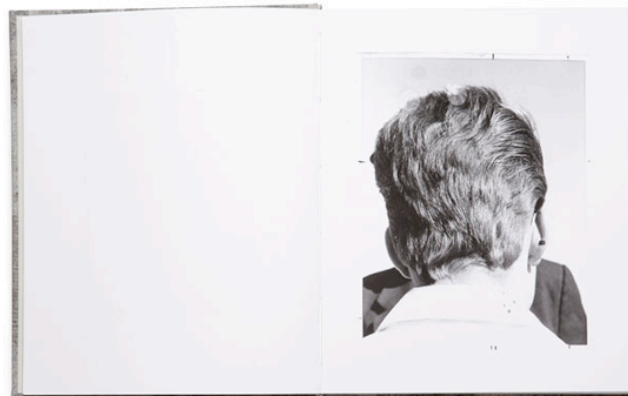
La Jetee – Chris Marker – 1962

Herein, at least for me, lies the wonder of this book. It is the actualisation of all the imagery I have come to associate with this type of story through film. It could easily be a collection of stills from a Kurosawa Noir or a B-reel Mitchum. To present these cinematic tropes as fact, as »real«, calls into question my memories, and where said imagery comes from, much like when David Hemmings's character discovers a murder he doesn't remember witnessing in »Blow-Up«. I remember all the Crime films and Noirs I've seen, at least subconsciously, but cannot remember being a detective in 1950's Tokyo. The book therefore presents me with the documentation of a memory I'd forgotten. The experience of the photographer, sequenced into a filmic narrative, becomes my experience through the familiarity and organisational power of the series. Less narratively sequenced, the »unconnectedness« of the events would have a more alienating effect, thus making it clear I wasn't actually there. The story, therefore, allows me into a reality I never experienced.



Blow Up – Antonioni – 1966

Christian Patterson seems to have thought all this through in researching and assembling his masterpiece, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (Mack Books, 2011). To quote the book's publisher: »Redheaded Peckerwood is a work with a tragic underlying narrative – the story of 19 year old Charles Starkweather and 14 year old Caril Ann Fugate who murdered ten people, including Fugate's family, during a three day killing spree across Nebraska to the point of their capture in Douglas, Wyoming. The images record places and things central to the story, depict ideas inspired by it, and capture other moments and discoveries along the way.« In Patterson's forward, he lists the numerous films that have been inspired by this »true« story, (although not Springsteen's album *Nebraska*, disappointingly). The book then sets about de-narrativising these events.



Redheaded Peckerwood – Christian Patterson (Mack Books, 2011)

Like a »Criminal Investigation«, the book documents crimes that happened many years ago, but in this case does so by presenting fact as fiction, fiction as fact. The images are of locations, objects, archive material and scenes that are, or could be, tangentially linked to the actual events. The power of the book lies in their plausibility. Instead of presenting the viewer with a causal chain, Patterson shows the fringes, the outskirts of the story. These are the film's »cutaways«, filler a film-maker might use when a cut doesn't quite work, or when a montage sequence is needed for emotional effect or to move the story along. Instead of linking events, he

breaks them apart, relying on the fact the the viewer already remembers this much mediated »reality« and will, therefore, be able to recognise the memories even though, in some cases, they are fabricated. He feeds of a collective recollection, a myth, and thus reclaims it as both something that could have happened as well as something that did happen, without resorting to the conventions of the »photo-story« or »photo-novel«. To have these two possibilities co-exist foregrounds the role imagery plays in our collective consciousnesses, as well as the power of photographic series. This is a »photo-un-story«, a photo-un-film.



Redheaded Peckerwood – Christian Patterson (Mack Books, 2011)

Both books tell the story of a fact. Both books, consciously or not, draw upon our cinematic stores of imagery. Both books, finally, allows the feeling of one having been somewhere one wasn't but could have been, lived through, remembered.