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WANDERING IN A SEA OF ICE: VOYAGE, NARRATIVE AND RESONANCE IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF NILS STRINDBERG

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Abstract

Nils Strindberg (1872-1897) was a Swedish photographer that took part in Salomon August Andrée's Balloon *Expedition* to the North Pole in 1897. The expedition failed – three days after the departure, the balloon landed on frozen sea and the three men tried to walk homewards for three months until they died. Thirty-three years later, their remains were found and, among them, Strindberg's camera and exposed films. This article considers not only the questions that arise when we first see Strindberg's images – how did this photograph survived and came to us? What happened after the balloon disappeared in the horizon? – but also aims to contextualize this photographic set in the history of Arctic imagery and to analyse its semantic resonances on artistic and authorial creation, thus demonstrating its importance, beyond an historical approach.

Keywords: Photography, Arctic, Salomon August Andrée, Narrative and Resonance

WANDERING IN A SEA OF ICE: VOYAGE, NARRATIVE AND RESONANCE IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF NILS STRINDBERG

Written by Eduardo Brito

Introduction

At 1:55 pm July 11th, 1897, the hydrogen balloon Eagle took off from Danes Island, on the Svalbard archipelago, towards the North Pole. Aboard, the photographer Nils Strindberg, meteorologist Knut Fränkel and chief engineer Salomon August Andrée. Thirty-three years later, the remains of the expedition were found at Kvitøya Island, 260 miles east their departing point. Among them, was one of the 13x18 cameras and seven copper cylinders, containing 48 films. From the 240 exposures, 93 still had information enough to be printed, thus bringing to light a set of images that depict, alongside with the diaries, the expedition's narrative and fate: the three men wandered on a frozen sea for three months, trying to reach land, surviving and photographing. In this essay, the archaeology of this photographic set is presented, from the images' conception to their finding, recovering and archiving process. Their photographic essence and ontology are also analysed – be it through their inscription on arctic photographic imagery, and their black-box effect as a document of an ill-fated journey – be it through their semantic resonances on artistic and authorial creation, inspiring, among others, Per Olof Sundman's book *Ingenjör Andrées luftfärd* (The Flight Of the Eagle, 1967), Jan Troell's homonymous film from 1982 and his 1997 *En frusen dröm* (A Frozen Dream) documentary, Joachim Koester installation *A Message from Andrée* and Tyronne Martinsson rephotographic work. This exercise will allow us to understand the importance of Nils Strindberg's work beyond an historical / documentary approach. To the Pole in the second half of the nineteenth century, polar exploration was seen as national pride issue. Rather than finding a northwest or northeast passage – which had proven its ineffectiveness as a trade route – the old dream of reaching the North Pole was now a big challenge, the last stop in the long journey north started by Pytheas of Massilia, in the third century B.C., continued by St. Brendan, William Barents, Vitus Bering, Edward Parry, John Franklin, and John Rae among many others¹. The idea was sparked on March 16th, 1894: the polar explorer Baron Nordenskjöld met the engineer Salomon August Andrée at the Anthropological and Geographical Society of Sweden². He told him about the possibility of using balloons for polar exploration. Andrée, who had been fascinated by flying machines since 1876, became excited about the possibility. The challenge was launched: the expedition would leave Virgo Bay on Danes Island, Svalbard's northernmost point, and, taking advantage of southerly winds – that would allow a travel speed of 19 kilometres per hour – would reach the North Pole in just 43 hours and then head to the polar regions of Russia or Canada. The trip was enthusiastically supported by all quarters of Swedish society. King Oskar II and Alfred Nobel were two of its funders. When Andrée presented the project at the 6th International Congress of Geography in London, June 1895, A. Silva White, experienced balloonist, launched the first warning: “as much I sympathize with every daring attempt in the cause of science, I cannot

¹ On Arctic exploration: Jeanette Mirsky, *To the Arctic! The Story of Northern Exploration from Earliest Times* (1948), University of Chicago Press, 1970.

² VV.AA., *Andrée's Story – e Complete Records of His Polar Flight, 1897 – From the Diaries and Journals of S. A. Andrée, Nils Strindberg and K. Fränkel, found on White Island in the Summer of 1930 and edited by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography*, New York, e Viking Press, 1930, 26.

regard his project in any other light than that of a bold flight into the unknown”³. Still, the project progresses: Henri Lachambre, assisted by Alexis Machuron, builds the balloon in Paris during the year 1895. To navigate with as much control as possible, Andrée introduced guide ropes and sails. Nisse Nils Strindberg, the expedition’s photographer was born on September 4th, 1872, son of Johan Oscar Strindberg and Rosalie Lundgren. He was the third of four brothers, second cousin of the playwright August Strindberg. Nisse, as he was known, studied physics at Uppsala University, where he graduated in 1892. He started photographing around Christmas of that year⁴. In 1894, Strindberg describes his 5-10 second exposures of the sky – a fact that establishes an interesting connection with the celestographs made by his cousin August, precisely around that time⁵. Also in 1894, Nils met Anna Charlier, the love of his life, to whom he will write long letters from the icy sea. In the summer of 1895, Strindberg worked as a geodesist, measuring and studying the Earth’s surface. In September, shortly after becoming assistant professor in physics at Stockholm University, he was accepted to the Expedition’s team⁶. Soon after his appointment, Nils worked on the cameras required for the journey, along with Karl Westberg and J. Harden, specialist manufacturers at Petersson Handels-och Fabriksaktiebolag. For the expedition, Strindberg would take two 13×18 Pettersson AB, of 7kg each, with a mechanical date marker on the negative, and a Bullet Camera 8×8 – a stereoscopic camera, used only before departure⁷. False Start On June 7th, 1896, Salomon August Andrée, meteorologist Nils Ekholm and photographer Nils Strindberg left Gothenburg for Svalbard, arriving at Danes Island on June 22nd. The 51-piece crew immediately started building the big balloon house, on a piece of land granted to Andrée by Arnold Pike, an Englishman who had built a cabin there in 1888⁸. The monstrous structure was ready on July 21st and two days later, the Eagle began its inflation that lasted until the 27th. From that date until August 16th, the expedition awaited the southerly wind that did not arrive. Routine tests were done and the results showed a more complex scenario than the one foreseen: a much larger than expected leakage of hydrogen – which would mean that the balloon could spend less time in the air; and proof that the friction of the guide ropes duplicated the journey’s length. Due to these facts, Nils Ekholm abandoned the expedition, foreseeing forthcoming problems. He was replaced by Knut Fraenkel, a 26-year-old engineer. The Long Journey The following year, the group returned to Danes Island on May 30th. On June 22nd, the Eagle was inflated and ready to leave at any moment. During a storm on July 8th, the balloon lost 70 cubic litres of hydrogen, twice the acceptable amount. The following days are days of great hesitation by Andrée: amidst the obvious problems with the balloon and fearing a second fiasco could lead to public discrediting of, he decides to leave on July 11th. In a letter to Anna Charlier, written July 21st from the frozen sea, Strindberg confesses that Andrée was not firm on his decision to leave – he stood before him and Fraenkel, asking “shall we try or

³ Salomon August Andrée, “A Plan to Reach the North Pole by Ballon” in Report of the Sixth International Geographical Congress: Held in London, 1895, (1896), Ed. J. Murray, 225.

⁴ Tyrone Martinsson, “Nils Strindberg, Arctic Photographer” (2010), in Email to Eduardo Brito, 18.04.2011.

⁵ On August Strindberg’s Celestographs: Douglas Feuk, “The Celestographs of August Strindberg”, www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/3/celestographs.php [Accessed June 10th 2015].

⁶ Letter from Nils Strindberg to Oskar Strindberg, dated 17.9.1895: Tyrone Martinsson, “Nils Strindberg, Arctic Photographer” (2010), in Email to Eduardo Brito, 18.04.2011.

⁷ Tyrone Martinsson, “Nils Strindberg, the photographic equipment and the photographs of the expedition” (2010), in Email to Eduardo Brito, 18.04.2011.

⁸ Alec Wilkinson, *The Ice Balloon: S. A. Andree and the Heroic Age of Arctic Exploration* (Ed. Fourth Estate, 2013), 125.

not?”⁹. At 1:55 p.m., Andrée finally gave the starting order. The ropes were cut and the Eagle rose disorderly. According to Captain Ehrenswärd, who witnessed the ascent, when the balloon touched the wooden house structure, Andrée said “what the hell was that?”, being muffled by the immediate cry of Strindberg “long live Sweden”¹⁰. The take off was disastrous. Not gaining enough altitude, in a few minutes the crew was forced to discard 460 of the 1234 kg of ballast used to control the altitude. The guide ropes were dropped in the confusion of the situation and in a few minutes Andrée’s great technical innovation was lost. It is unknown why the expedition did not perform an emergency landing. Alexis Machuron photographed the balloon’s zigzag to the horizon — a pre-tragic image, the last picture of the expedition for the next thirty-three years. The south-westerly wind pushed the Eagle to its destination. On the second day, the thickness of the clouds caused pressure on the balloon, thus making it descend. At six o’clock, the balloon touched the ice surface, starting a bouncing motion up and down that eventually ended at 7:30 am, July 14th, 1897: very quietly the Eagle landed on the white floor. Andrée, Frænkel and Strindberg left the balloon. Strindberg moved away a few steps with his camera and photographed the inglorious end of the Salomon August Andrée Polar Expedition at 82°56’ North and 29°52’ East [Fig. 1] . It was time to set up camp in order to rest and reorganize the expedition. Then nothing remained but to plan a route back home and walk. What follows next – to cut a long story short – is no less than three months of wandering on a sea of ice.



[Fig. 1]
 NILS STRINDBERG
 Salomon August Andrée Polar Expedition, July 14th 1897
 Courtesy Gränna Museum, Sweden

On August 1st, calculating the expedition’s location, Strindberg realizes that due to the force of the sea streams, the expedition has actually spent the last two weeks moving backwards. They were four kilometres further from their destination than when they started. For that reason they would not reach land to winter on by the desired time. This was the first blow to the three explorers’ confidence. With scarce provisions, extreme fatigue and the cold brought by the end of summer, the three passengers spotted land for the first time since July 11th. It was September 15th. They camped on the frozen ice around the White Island and, on the night of October 2nd, the ice broke up into small pieces, spreading the camp adrift. Andrée, Strindberg and Frænkel, exhausted, sore, with diarrhea, snow blindness, stomach pain, cramps and deeply discouraged, arrived to the frozen earth on October the 5th 1897. Two days later, Strindberg wrote:

⁹ Nils Strindberg, “Shorthand letters to His Fiancée” in Andrée’s Story – The Complete Records of His Polar Flight, 1897 –From the Diaries and Journals of S. A. Andrée, Nils Strindberg and K. Frænkel, found on White Island in the Summer of 1930 and edited by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography. New York: The Viking Press, 1930, 384.

¹⁰ Tyrone Martinsson, “Nils Strindberg, Arctic Photographer” (2010), in Email to Eduardo Brito, 18.04.2011.

“moving”¹¹. After that, all felt silent. The last entry in Strindberg’s diary is an ink-pen writing, stating: “October 17, home, 7:05 am”¹². According to Alec Wilkinson, as ink freezes and the whole diary is written in pencil, the annotation might have been made prior to departure — Strindberg expected to arrive in Stockholm on that same day¹³. The Mystery Begins The mystery of Andrée started July 15th, 1897. It is on this date that the penultimate news from the expedition was found: the Norwegian ship *Alken* caught one of the balloon’s carrier pigeons. The message contained a cheery “all well on board.” Over the years that follow, the expedition became a mirage. Several newspapers reported alleged sightings of the crew in Alaska, Russia, Greenland, dead or alive¹⁴. Aftermath The spoils of the polar expedition and the bodies of the three men were found by accident on August 6th, 1930 in White Island, by a scientific expedition led by Gunnar Horn¹⁵. Inside the tent, preserved by ice were numerous objects, utensils, and one of the photographic cameras made by Strindberg. On its side, seven copper cylinders containing 13×18 rolls, Eastman Kodak brand, and valid until January 1, 1898. Four of the seven rolls found had been exposed.

They were delivered to John Hertzberg, scientist at the Royal Technical University (KTH) in Stockholm, who developed and duplicated the negatives¹⁶. Of the possible 240 photographs, 93 contained information. They were deposited at the Royal Academy of Sweden in 1944 and, since then, little or nothing was known about their whereabouts until 1997, when they were found in the Academy’s attic¹⁷. Researcher Tyrone Martinsson proceeded to scan the images in the early 2000s. Currently, they are archived in Grenna Museum and available online on the Museum’s website¹⁸. By establishing the link between Strindberg’s diary and the mecanographic date inscribed on each image, it became possible to set the precise date of some of the photographs. This method allowed Martinsson to propose that the Strindberg photographs were taken between July 11 and August 30th, 1897. Yet in his first diary of the expedition, Andrée wrote on September 19 “we photographed the island”¹⁹. Contextualizing: the Circle’s imagery Like any drift into the unknown, polar exploration comprises a considerable imaginary dimension. Fantastic descriptions and maps abound since ancient times: in terms of myths, it all started with the quest of Thule, an island in the North Atlantic, located six days of navigation from the Orkneys: thus it is described, from an account of Pytheas of Marseilles in the third century BC, by Diodorus Siculus in his *Historical Library*, and Strabo, in his *Geography*, both from century I BC. Thule was also imagined centuries later, by Olaus Magnus, Bishop of Uppsala, in his *Carta Marina*: a

¹¹ Nils Strindberg, “Marginal Notes On the Calendar Page of Strindberg’s Almanac” in *Andrée’s Story – The Complete Records of His Polar Flight, 1897 – From the Diaries and Journals of S. A. Andrée, Nils Strindberg and K. Frænkel, found on White Island in the Summer of 1930 and edited by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography.* (New York: e Viking Press, 1930), 366.

¹² Strindberg, *op. cit.*, 29.

¹³ Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 222.

¹⁴ <http://ku-prism.org/polarscientist/andreemystery/July301897Chicago.htm> [Accessed June 10th 2015]. and Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 155, 157 and 159.

¹⁵ One mystery solved, another mystery begins: how did the explorers die? As the only one buried, Strindberg was the first. Alongside the bodies of Andrée and Frænkel, remnants of provisions, bearskins and para n exclude hunger and cold as causes of death, generating much speculation, from carbon monoxide poisoning to bear attacks, without forgetting or neglecting the whiteness of apathy, exhaustion, despair – cf. Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 223.

¹⁶ Hertzberg’s report: *VV. AA.*, *op. cit.*, 163.

¹⁷ Tyrone Martinsson, “Recovering the visual history of the Andrée expedition: A case study in photographic research”, in *Research Issues in Art Design and Media*, issue 6, 2004, 2.

¹⁸ www.grennamuseum.se/info.aspx?visa=galleri [Accessed June 10th 2015].

¹⁹ Salomon August Andrée, “Andrée’s First Diary” in *Andrée’s Story – e Complete Records of His Polar Flight, 1897 – From the Diaries and Journals of S. A. Andrée, Nils Strindberg and K. Frænkel, found on White Island in the Summer of 1930 and edited by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography.* New York: e Viking Press, 1930, 353.

detailed map of the seas and of the northern kingdoms, published in Venice in 1539. This map was the result of a two-year journey the author did to the far and unknown North, that also gave birth to the colossal book *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*, illustrated by five hundred pictures of customs, rites and animalia, naturalia and mirabilia, over 770 chapters, published in Rome in 1555. Forty years later, in his cartography of 1595 *Septentrionalium Terrarum Descriptio*, Mercator mapped a North Pole called *Rupes Nigra* after a description given by a non-existent book from the early fifteenth century, thought to be lost at the time: *Inventio Fortunata*²⁰, which postulated that the polar region was composed of four islands – one of them inhabited by pygmies – and a polar sea between them. In a place where the nights and days stretch to months, the spectacularity of physical phenomena enhances the imaginations, with auroras and other optical phenomena such as the squared sun (the *Nova Zemlya* effect), firstly described in 1597 by Gerrit de Veer²¹, during Barrents' third expedition in search of the Northeast Passage, and the *fata morgana* mirage effect – the one that, regarding an imaginary mountain range, enabled John Ross to state he “distinctly saw the land round the bottom of the bay, forming a chain of mountains connected (...) along north and south”²². Polar regions are, therefore, “an endless succession of palaces of ice, strong castles, cathedrals, and fantastical structures; some majestically indifferent to the waves which caress their mighty bases”, as described by Alexis Machuron²³, and seen, among others, in the works of Caspar David Friedrich and Frederick William Church. The Photographs of Nils Strindberg Nils Strindberg's images can be inscribed in this long tradition of Arctic imagery and representation, characterized by its fascinating and unusual visuality. Yet, the photographs of Andrée's Expedition are far from being the first images derived from polar expeditions. Since Amos Bonsall's daguerreotypes, taken during Elisha Kent Kane's expedition in 1853²⁴, the photographic image became essential in Arctic exploration, either as an element of undeniable scientific value, or also as a reason for artistic expeditions – such as William Bradford's journey to West Greenland in 1869, where he took the images that can be found in his book *The Arctic Regions*, illustrated with photographs taken on an art expedition to Greenland, with descriptive narrative by the artist, published in 1873. Nils Strindberg's photographs were made between July 11th and August 30th, 1897²⁵. These pictures comprise one of the expedition's main scientific objectives: to explore the polar region by balloon and document through photography²⁶, though during the flight's three days, Strindberg took only three photos. It is now time to understand why and where is the undeniable richness of Strindberg's images taken during his drift on a sea of ice. We have seen that this is not a pioneering and extensive body of images. Let's set aside their permanence under the ice for 33

²⁰ On the lost book *Inventio Fortunata*: <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/exploration/johnday.html> [Accessed June 10th 2015].

²¹ On January 24th 1597, Gerrit de Veer, a member of Barents' crew, described for the first time the mirage called *Nova Zemlya* effect: “The 24 of January it was faire cleare weather, with a west wind. Then I and Jacob Hermskercke, and another with vs, went to the sea-side on the south side of Noua Zembla, where, contrary to our expectation, I saw the edge of the sun; herewith we speedly home againe, to tell William Barents and the rest of our companion that joyfull newes. But William Barents, being a wise and well experienced pilot, would not believe it, esteeming it to be about fourteene daies too soone for the sunne to shin in that part of the world, but we earnestly a rirmed the contrary and said we had seene the sunne.”, *De VEER*, Gerrit, in the three Voyages Of William Barents to the Arctic Regions (1594, 1595, 1596) (Ed. Elibron Classics, 2005), 143.

²² Jeanette Mirsky, op. cit., 99.

²³ Henri Lachambre and Alexis Machuron, op. cit., 108.

²⁴ Richard G. Condon “The History and Development of Arctic Photography”, in *Arctic Anthropology*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 46-87 (Ed. University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). www.jstor.org/stable/40316177 [Accessed June 10th 2015].

²⁵ See sub-chapter 5.2 Aftermath.

²⁶ VV.AA. *Andrée's Story – e Complete Records of His Polar Flight, 1897 – From the Diaries and Journals of S. A. Andrée, Nils Strindberg and K. Frænkel, found on White Island in the Summer of 1930 and edited by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography*. (New York: e Viking Press, 1930), 33, and Tyrone Martinsson “Nils Strindberg, the photographic equipment and the photographs of the expedition” (2010), in Email to Eduardo Brito, 18.04.2011.

years and also their chance discovery and salvation in 1930 – one must mention here the recent finding, in 2013, of a set of 22 negative cellulose films from Shackleton’s expedition to the Ross Sea, between 1914 and 1917, kept on ice for almost one hundred years. The fundamental importance of Strindberg’s images dwells in the narrative they suggest, and in the contribution they make to understand a philosophical dimension of photography. In the first case, the existence of photographs prior and subsequent to Strindberg’s set allows us to draw its pre- and post history: hence a long diachronic process starts with the images from the first expedition in 1896 and continues until the images of the spoil’s discovery in 1930. In this case, Strindberg’s photographs remain as an historical document, closer to the museological curiosity by the *mirabilia* – be it by its survival conditions, be it as a closing chapter of an open narrative. Ghosts and Death

In the second case – this set’s contribution to a philosophical dimension of photography – one can say that a first approach to these images leads us to the phantasmatic field²⁷. In fact, images such as *All at the campsite* [Fig. 2], among many others, recall dematerialization, turning these men into ghosts, close to William Mumler’s double exposures, sold as spirit photography in the 1860s²⁸. It is possible to say here that in this images lays that period’s dual understanding of photography: they represent the indexing side of positive science, but, in some sort of opposite polarity, they suggest the creation of an imaginary world, full of hallucinations, phantoms and spectres. This approach links the photographs of Strindberg to the “inventory of mortality” enunciated by Sontag²⁹ and also to “the return of the dead”, “the living image of a dead thing”³⁰ referred by Roland Barthes. But, besides the previous practical and theoretical alignment, one can think these images alongside the fascination that photography has always shown for monsters and monstrous structures: it is through here that this set of images highlights two conditions of impossibility.



[Fig. 2]
 NILS STRINDBERG
 All at the campsite. Circa July 26th /28th 1897
 Courtesy Gränna Museum, Sweden

Monsters and Impossibility

First condition of impossibility: these images belong to a wide range of photographic fascinations with a certain idea of monstrosities: from disturbances in the landscape to large industrial

²⁷ Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 232 and Martinsson, *op. cit.*, 21.

²⁸ Medeiros, Margarida, *Fotografia e Verdade, uma história de fantasmas*, (Ed. Assírio & Alvim, Col. Arte e Produção, 2010), 154.

²⁹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1973), NY: Ed. Picador, 2009, 70.

³⁰ Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire* (1980); portuguese edition – *A Câmara Clara*, Edições 70, Col. Arte & Comunicação, 1998, 23-24; 112.

plants in the world, passing by the machinery, the cranes, but also the ruins, the abandoned buildings, the ghost towns and structures such as the house of the balloon at the base of the Danes Island, everything seems impossible in the frame, in scale, in the effort, in the result. The image of the landed balloon and its crew watching it in a pose that suggests astonishment and amazement, is quite paradigmatic: a photograph in which the balloon, the central subject, might not be the only disturbing element of the image: the monstrous vastness of the white landscape, undefined by the absence of shadows, has no scale, oscillating between a white chroma and endlessness.



[Fig. 3]
NILS STRINDBERG
Self portrait, 1897
Courtesy Gränna Museum, Sweden

Also Nils Strindberg's self-portrait [Fig. 3], where he stands as a giant man leaving the frame, in a pose that suggests an impossible lightness of the sled, which would weight around 160 kg³¹. Against a backdrop of ice hummocks, this solemnity seems nothing more than a deliberate concealment of the danger, despair and difficulty. The impossible survival of these negatives allows us to establish a path to the journey's fate: that's why this set exemplifies Vilém Flusser's assertion on the magic condition of the images' significance, a condition well beyond its phonetic similarity³². Magic is the mystery of things that turn into otherness or disappear: so, the photographic image is by necessity magic – because it operates a physical and chemical processing and because it proposes a magical and impossible return: imagination. These images, rather than let us know, allow us to imagine. Imagine the last sighting of the balloon by the three passengers on their return march; imagine the cold, imagine the anguish. Here lies the second condition of impossibility: looking at this series, we are no less than posthumous spectators of a tremendous mistake and an impossible survival, close to what Barthes calls the "stasis and essence of an arrest"³³. The images that escaped erosion over 33 years show us three men fading away. Men like us, who made the wrong decision and due to that, far from being ghosts, are now (or were then) in a double degree of disappearance: they have already disappeared from the

³¹ Nils Strindberg, "Shorthand letters to His Fiancée" in *Andrée's Story – e Complete Records of His Polar Flight, 1897* – From the Diaries and Journals of S.A. Andrée, Nils Strindberg and K. Fränkel, found on White Island in the Summer of 1930 and edited by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography. New York: e Viking Press, 1930, 387.

³² Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photogaphy*, Reaktion Books, 2007, 9.

³³ Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire* (1980); portuguese edition – *A Câmara Clara*, Edições. 70, Col. Arte & Comunicação, 1998, 128.

visible world and yet still there, lost somewhere beyond human space, in another kind of time (real and photographic), ready to walk on water and disappear.

Resonance

In *Uses of Photography*³⁴, John Berger argues that the photographic image is something that “continues to exist in time instead of being arrested moments”. Therefore he proposes an understanding of photography as an incorporation of memory, rather than “using it as a substitute”. Thus, the image ceases to be used as an illustration of an argument, as a demonstration of a thought or as a tautology and is read according to “laws of memory”, namely its radial nature that proposes an axis of associations around the same event. It is this centrifugal path that allows each image to always be a “now” in time, “not its own original time (...), but in narrated time”: be it history as social memory, but also emotional, artistic, because “there is never a single approach to something remembered.” So one can realize the importance of Strindberg’s photographs: either as ghosts, monsters or impossibilities, whether as “missing pieces” in a historically complex puzzle: its radial understanding – historical, philosophical and resonant – makes them into images that generate images: soon in 1930, these images were printed with a strong post-production retouching work, according to a logic of beautification, thus originating other images, almost identical. They were published in the volume *Andrée’s Story – The Complete Records of His Polar Flight, 1897*, a book that would serve as the basis for the book *Per Olof Sundman, Ingenjör Andrees luftfärd (the Flight of the Eagle, 1967)*, which, based on the diaries of Andrée and Strindberg, has Knut Frænkel as narrator. In 1982, *Ingenjör Andrees luftfärd* was adapted to film by Jan Troell. The images of Strindberg are leitmotifs of film shots, allowing Troell to propose an interesting topic on the representation of photography by cinema, in a film-remake of the photographic shot logic – an exercise that brings us to the idea of rephotography – whether the ones made on site by Tyrone Martinsson (2011), or, more ironically, the one proposed by Connor King’s *Recreation of Andree’s First Polar Bear (Arctic, 2010)*. Troell returned to the expedition and his photographic imagery, with the documentary *En Frusen Drom (A Frozen Dream)*, dating from 1997: the images are displayed with no sign of post-production and editing, allowing the observer to understand a second layer of time expressed on the photographic surface: after the time framed in 1897, it is now the long waiting a hundred years that is shown to us. This noise, which belongs to the images as much as their spatial and figurative elements, is something close to what James Elkins calls the surround³⁵: a field beyond the essential and intentional each photographic image has, that exists as something intrinsic and resistant to interpretation. The surround “does not advance our knowledge of the subject” but allows you to extend its reading field beyond the radial axes of affection, history, documentation and art, proposing a photographic function, which, according to Elkins, gives us all kinds of things we do not want. “Boring things, repetitive things, things that are beside de point, annoying things (...), splotches and stains (...). Photography is at war with our attention”³⁶. These images’ surround, composed by the interference and noise of a long process of wait, seem to have been part of Rebecca Baron’s feed for the short film *The Idea of North* (1995), Joachim Koester’s installation, *Message From Andrée* (2005), and Pedro Valdez Cardoso’s installation *Ártico* (2015). All the cases explore the dot, the noise, the emptiness and unclearness of these images as generators of meanings and messages. In the photographic part of his installation, Cardoso associates Strindberg’s archival images to other polar photographic sets, in order to generate a fictitious documentary of an expedition that might have ended in tragedy. In *Message From*

³⁴ John Berger, “Uses of Photography”(1978) in *Understanding a Photograph*, Penguin, 2013, 58.

³⁵ James Elkins, *What Photography Is*, NY: Routledge, 2011, 116.

³⁶ Elkins, *op. cit.*, 174.

Andrée, Koester uses the images' surroundings as an encrypted message the viewer may or may not decipher, while Baron expands and approaches the grain and the dot as some sort of murmur, just like the aseptic voice that after narrating the journeys' facts tells us "do you want to wash yourself, Nisse?", a sentence written by Andrée to July 21, 1897 in his diary³⁷. As images that generate other images, the photographs of Nils Strindberg demonstrate a double sense of wonder: one necessarily induced by its origin, the other inherent in the act of reading a photographic plan: a wander through a non-linear act of reading, that defeats the time and history of which it is made of.

A Brief Conclusion ending in a quote

In any of these images – like maybe in any photograph – it might be useful to recall the photographic principle of Oswald Bates, the archivist played by actor Timothy Spall in the series *Shooting The Past* (Stephen Poliakoff, 1999), when he states "I just have to say one thing to make these pictures electrifying: these people, some of these people, are about to be hit by the most terrible change. Their whole worlds turned upside down. They have no idea"³⁸.

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³⁷ Salomon August Andrée, "Andrée's First Diary" in Andrée's Story – e Complete Records of His Polar Flight, 1897 – From the Diaries and Journals of S. A. Andrée, Nils Strindberg and K. Frænkel, found on White Island in the Summer of 1930 and edited by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography. New York: e Viking Press, 1930, 313.

³⁸ Stephen Poliakoff, *Shooting The Past*, 1999.

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