

To Live as a Photograph

Humanities Research Centre Seminar

24 March 2014, 4.00 – 5.30pm Conference Room. AD Hope #14 Australian National University

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In this paper, I contrast the circulatory qualities of big news atrocity photography with the restricted movement of more mundane, little photographs of blacks in South Africa in the 1960-70s. The technology of instant photography Pol roid especially, was employed by the apartheid regime to create and control populations. The purpose of the pass photograph was to bind its subject tightly to the reference book—to firmly and formally fix an identity. The passbook photo locks the person into an inflexible relationship with his picture, as a single unit that forms a legal identity: the one is incomplete without the other. In this paper, I examine the intersection of three important scenes of passbook photography that associate the technology with a particular kind of civil death: Athol Fugard, John Kane, and Winston Ntshona's play Sizwe Bansi is Dead (1972); black South African photographer Ernest Cole's illegal documentary exposé of life under apartheid, The House of Bondage (1968); and the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement in Boston, whose activism precipitated the first divestment of a multi-national corporation from South Africa.

Joseph Slaughter is associate professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, where he and in the fields of postcolonial literature and theory, African, Caribbean, and Latin American literatures, narrative theory, and human rights. His publications include articles in *Alif, Human Rights Quarterly, Research in African Literatures, The Journal of Human Rights, Politics and Culture, Comparative Literature Studies,* and *PMLA*. He is a founding coeditor of *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*. He is the recipient of a number of prestigious prizes and fellowships, including a Guggenheim Fellowship (2009). His first book, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (Fordham, 2007) was awarded the 2000 René Wellek prize for comparative literature and cultural theory. He is currently completing two books: *New Word Orders,* on intellectual property and world literature, and *Pathetic Fallacies*, which revises the standard history of international human rights law by taking account of the roles that colonialism, corporations, and corporate person look played in the establishment of an international legal order and the juridical categories that later made human rights

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