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and Karin Priem

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Images as Presenters, Mediators, and Means of Observation

Edited by
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Chapter 9
Visual Presence and Interpretation: Two Dimensions of the Fight Against Illiteracy in Texts by Carlo Levi and Photographs by David Seymour (1950)

> None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory . . .
>
> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (1966)

Introduction

In March 1950, David Seymour started working on an ambitious reportage on illiteracy, then a major problem in Southern Italy. On assignment for UNESCO, he visited a number of remote villages in the region of Calabria: Roggiano Gravina, Bagaladi, Saucci, San Nicola da Crissa, Cimino, and Capistrano.[1] His journey resulted in approximately 540 pictures, many of which showed reading and writing classes for children and adults. These classes were run by local committees of the Unione nazionale per la lotta contro l'analfabetismo (National League for the Fight Against Illiteracy, UNLA), an organization created with the aim of establishing democratic political structures in Calabria by teaching peasants and their children how to read and write.[2] In all likelihood it was Carlo Levi who first introduced David Seymour to the mentality and the hierarchical and oppressive cultural, social, and political landscape of Southern Italy. Levi and Seymour were well acquainted, and it was Seymour who advised Levi to publish some of his articles focusing on the situation in Southern Italy in the *New York Times Magazine* in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[3]

1 See Giovanna Hendel, Carole Naggar, and Karin Priem, eds., *They Did Not Stop at Eboli: UNESCO and the Campaign against Illiteracy in a Reportage by David "Chim" Seymour and Texts by Carlo Levi (1950)* (Paris: UNESCO; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

2 On the first exchanges between UNESCO and UNLA, see Giovanna Hendel, "UNESCO's Archival Collections: A Rich Source for Telling the Gripping Story of the Fight against Illiteracy in Southern Italy," in Hendel, Naggar, and Priem, *They Did Not Stop at Eboli*, 181–197.

3 Carlo Levi wrote a total of five articles on the political and social problems in Calabria, which were published in the *New York Times Magazine*: "Peasants Stir in Groping Italy," *New York Times Magazine*, September 14, 1947; "For Freedom We Must Conquer Fear," *New York Times Magazine*, October 3, 1948; "Eboli Revisited: New Life Stirs," *New York Times Magazine*, March 13, 1949; "Italy Fights the Battle

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This chapter looks at both images and texts. By analyzing Seymour's photo story and contact sheets, I suggest that his pictures focus on what was visible and present at the time by providing a filmic archive of the fight against illiteracy and the efforts to achieve social change in Calabria. Conversely, I argue that Levi's texts focus on intellectual analysis and on reading and writing as necessary preconditions for political participation and citizenship. The chapter explores these two different approaches to the fight against illiteracy in Southern Italy while also taking into account interactions between images and texts. It first draws on textual sources and looks at how reading and writing are described, endorsed, and understood by a politically and socially engaged journalist, poet, and painter, Carlo Levi, who primarily focused on the mental, cultural, and political impacts of reading and writing. The chapter then discusses the successive moments or filmic presence in Seymour's series of photographs on the fight against illiteracy, while assuming that documentary photography also has an impact at the cultural and political levels. The chapter will conclude by focusing on the differences between visual and textual approaches and how these two dimensions interact to achieve societal change.

Textual Analysis and the Side Effect of Paintings: The Artist and the Political Activist

Carlo Levi's focus on one of the poorest regions in Italy was a direct result of his anti-fascist engagement. In the mid-1930s, Levi was arrested several times and finally "exiled" in Lucania (now Basilicata) by Mussolini's government. Levi portrayed the Southern Italian region to which he was banished in 1935–36 in his novel *Christ Stopped at Eboli*.[4]

In his novel, Levi writes that not only were members of the ruling classes fleeing the poverty and hardship of the South, preferring to lead a better life in Rome, Naples or abroad, but that south Italian migrants of all social strata were leaving behind those who were "physically deformed," "inept" or "lazy" – people labeled as "the discarded" and/or considered to have "no talents."[5] A high rate of male emigration from the South caused what Levi called a "matriarchal regime" with a high number of

Against Illiteracy," *New York Times Magazine*, November 6, 1949; and "Italy's Peasants Look at Land Reform," *New York Times Magazine*, May 17, 1953.

4 Written between December 1943 and July 1944, the novel was published in Italy in 1945 and in English translation in 1947: Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli: The Story of a Year*, trans. Frances Frenaye (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Company, 1947). See also Carole Naggar, "Carlo Levi and Chim: Ethics, Empathy, and Politics – A Journey into the Meezzogiorno," in Hendel, Naggar, and Priem, *They Did Not Stop at Eboli*, 245–252.

5 Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 28.

"illegitimate" children who never learned how to read or write even though they were eager to do so.[6] In the eyes of the peasants, the government in Rome had always been a distant alien power, and the only symbol of its presence, according to Levi, was a "public toilet" of monumental size that had been erected in the middle of a square in one of the villages; the peasants were not keen on using this symbol of modernity and hygiene.[7]

A recurring motif of Levi's novel is the "bottomless sadness of the desolate countryside," with the peasants' showing their hostility through resignation, apathy, and silence rather than by means of verbal expression and political opposition.[8] Levi wrote:

> There will always be an abyss between the State and the peasants, whether the State be Fascist, Liberal, Socialist or take on some new form in which the middle-class bureaucracy still survives. We can bridge the abyss only when we succeed in creating a government in which the peasants feel they have some share. . . . Plans laid by a central government, however much good they may do, still leave two hostile Italys on either side of the abyss. . . . Peasant civilization will always be the loser but it will not be entirely crushed. It will persevere under a cover of patience, interrupted by sporadic explosions, and the spiritual crisis will continue. Brigandage, the peasant war, is a symptom of what I mean, and this upheaval of the last century is not the last of its kind. Just as long as Rome rules over Matera, Matera will be lawless and despairing, and Rome despairing and tyrannical.[9]

In Levi's opinion, however, the worst enemies of the peasants were not the government or the landowners who lived in the cities, but those he referred to as the "physically and morally degenerate" "middle-class village tyrants."[10] Towards the end of his novel, Levi argued for the creation of a nation state of which the peasants would become an integral part and in which they would participate as an "autonomous or self-governing rural community."[11]

A *New York Times Magazine* article by Levi on the situation in Southern Italy, with a specific focus on education, was published two years later, in 1949. Entitled "Italy Fights the Battle of Illiteracy: That the people may learn democracy, the smallest villages strive to start schools," it was illustrated with five photographs by John Swope (1908–1979), who also worked for *LIFE* magazine.[12] In 1952 the very same article appeared in the *UNESCO Courier* with a slightly different title – "Southern Italy Fights the Battle Against Illiteracy" – and featured photographs by David Seymour, each accompanied by a caption consisting of a short text extracted from the

6 Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 102.
7 Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 45.
8 Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 65.
9 Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 250–251.
10 Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 252.
11 Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 254.
12 Levi, "Italy Fights the Battle Against Illiteracy."

full photo story created by David Seymour.[13] As already mentioned, Seymour was working on assignment for UNESCO to document the campaign against illiteracy in Southern Italy.

In his article Levi described the battle against illiteracy as a fight against a deeply rooted problem that was much more apparent in the South, and had to do with poverty and a long standing lack of democratic structures. According to Levi, the origins of illiteracy were not only economic; they could also be traced to the specific political and social culture and the related mentality of Italy's South. He accused past central governments and the ruling feudal classes of the South of having frozen the status quo for centuries by means of tyranny: blocking education for peasants and their children, preventing them from learning and from seizing opportunities to improve their lives and become independent. The resignation and apathy of the peasants was described as resulting from these structures, and Levi explicitly acknowledged the specific culture of the peasants' everyday life. He writes:

> They live in an immobile and timeless world, circumscribed by ancient rites and customs and the tasks imposed by the changing seasons; yet, a world that is rich in human values and a culture all its own. There is a peasant way of life that is radically different from our modern, urban civilization; a peasant art and a peasant philosophy that have been handed down without benefit of the written word in the heritage of legends, folk tales, popular dramas and songs, all of which have inspired or enriched our more sophisticated art forms.[14]

Levi repeatedly praised the peasants' affinity for poetry and symbolic language. However, he observed a fundamental lack of written culture and explained this by the peasants' wish to protect themselves from the central government and its oppressive language. Illiteracy was a means of self-imposed segregation and passive resistance.

In his article Levi repeatedly stressed his call for democratization by means of education. He wrote that the peasants welcomed the new republican government at the end of the Second World War as a new era, a chance to learn and to become fully accepted citizens – also with the support of the National League for the Fight Against Illiteracy (UNLA) and its local commissions and agents. In 1948, the reader learns, many local committees dedicated to fighting illiteracy were set up by enthusiastic teachers and others committed to tackling illiteracy. Despite a severe shortage of school buildings and teaching materials, there seems to have been a good level of attendance by young and adult learners at the various classes and courses organized by

13 Carlo Levi, "Southern Italy Fights the Battle Against Illiteracy," *UNESCO Courier* 5, no. 3 (1952): 3–5. Magnum photographers usually created a photo story by selecting individual pictures from their contact sheets and adding captions and comments which referred to this selection. For more details on Seymour's photo story on the fight against illiteracy in Southern Italy, see Hendel, Naggar, and Priem, *They Did Not Stop at Eboli*, 55–132.

14 Levi, "Italy Fights the Battle Against Illiteracy," 14.

the committees. Initiatives also included setting up libraries, providing radio receivers, magazines, and newspapers for educational purposes and organizing discussions on agricultural, technical, and medical issues.

Another article by Levi was published by the *New York Times Magazine* in 1953, this time on land reform. It is relevant for this chapter because the text is accompanied by a small selection of Levi's paintings portraying the ordinary people of the South.[15] In this text, Levi repeats his thoughts on the peasants' distance from and mistrust of any governmental reform, including the measures of the new republican government, which had redistributed farmland and invested a considerable sum in agricultural infrastructure and housing. Levi concluded that the peasants' world was hard to access and explains that he produced his paintings as a way of understanding their mentality: "Everywhere, I talked with the country people, I listened to them, looked into their faces and painted them, sure of finding an answer to questions to which their spoken response was anything but clear."[16] As an anti-fascist activist, artist, and journalist, Carlo Levi had been banished to the South as a political outcast by the Mussolini regime; it was for this reason that he was respected by the peasants. But despite this mutual acceptance, it was difficult for him to intellectually understand the villagers' mentality and constant fear of being betrayed by any kind of government. Levi felt that what he called the peasants' irrational mistrust and fear could not be explained by logic alone. He painted portraits in the hope that art would help him find a different mode of observation and understanding; at home in his studio, he saw "real human beings" and heard many confusing voices which led him to the final conclusion that the situation in the South "requires considerable interpretation."[17] In other words, the empathy and presence created by an image, even if it provided the keys to a better understanding, were only part of the solution Levi was looking for.

Carlo Levi's answer to the fundamental difference between, on the one hand, himself as an intellectual, political activist, and artist and, on the other hand, the peasants was to look more closely and to strive for a thorough analysis and detailed interpretation while acting and thinking from a perspective based on sensitivity, empathy, and respect.[18]

15 Levi, "Italy's Peasants Look at Land Reform."

16 Levi, "Italy's Peasants Look at Land Reform.", 12.

17 Levi, "Italy's Peasants Look at Land Reform."

18 Carole Naggar writes: "Because of Levi's deep, ongoing relationship with the visual world as a painter, we get the feeling that his collaboration with Chim went beyond the text he wrote for the *UNESCO Courier*. It is as if Levi . . . was trying to abolish the distance between word and image." See Carole Naggar, "Carlo Levi and Chim: Ethics, Empathy, and Politics – A Journey into the Mezzogiorno," in Hendel, Naggar, and Priem, *They Did Not Stop at Eboli,* 247–248.

Visual Presence and Embodied Technology: The Photographer's Approach

In an essay on the "uses of photography," John Berger writes that with the "invention of the lightweight camera" and the emergence of photojournalism, taking a picture "ceased to be a ritual and became a 'reflex.'"[19] In photojournalism, as opposed to traditional journalism, the roles of text and photograph were reversed: the text was subordinated to the picture. This was a fundamental working principle of the photography cooperative Magnum, founded in 1947. Magnum's photographers, who included David Seymour, one of the founding members of the cooperative, were asked to create and edit photo stories based on their contact sheets by selecting photographs for publication and adding captions and comments to them. To this day, the Magnum Archives in Paris and New York hold the full collection of photo stories created by Magnum photographers, all of which adhered to the rule that "the text follows the image." This collection also includes a full record of all Magnum contact sheets. While the archives thus serve as the infrastructural backbone for publishing and promoting Magnum photographs around the globe, they hold equal relevance and importance as historical archives.

Kristen Lubben, currently serving as executive director at the Magnum Foundation, describes contact sheets of analog photography films as full records of a photographer's work and itinerary. According to Lubben, looking at contact sheets means having intimate access to a photographer's "diary of experiences, a private tool that records mistakes, missteps, dead ends – and lucky breaks."[20] Contact sheets are said to show the "full process of image-making," and each picture has its place as a specific moment and connecting element within a sequence.[21] Thus, contact sheets can be described as a filmic record and testimony of a photographer's work – or, as Lubben puts it:

> On the cusp of becoming anachronistic [in the digital age], they take on the aura of history and come to stand in for a bygone era in photography, with its manual cameras and whiff of darkroom chemicals. No longer an active working tool for most photographers, the contact sheet is relegated to the archive, of interest as a historic document. Its value there may yet prove even greater than its original function; an enduringly accessible record of what and how photographers saw for nearly a century.[22]

If one looks at David Seymour's contact sheets as filmic historical documents (see for example Figs. 9.1–9.3), one should also consider John Berger's line of argumentation

19 John Berger, "Uses of Photography," in *About Looking*, ed. John Berger (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 53.

20 Kristen Lubben, ed., *Magnum Contact Sheets* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017), 10.

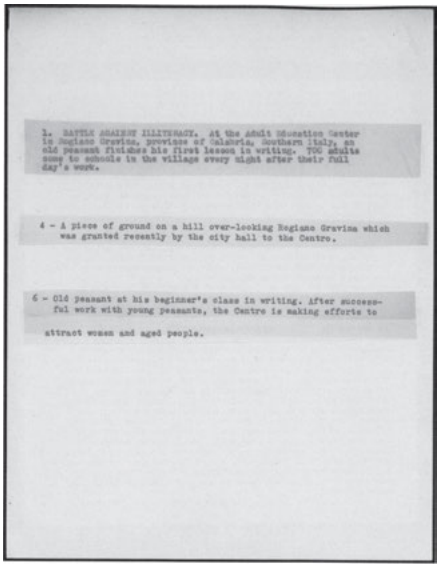
21 Kristen Lubben, ed., *Magnum Contact Sheets* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017), 12.

22 Kristen Lubben, ed., *Magnum Contact Sheets* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017), 14.

that photographs are historical traces and a set of appearances recorded by means of a specific technology. According to Berger, a photographic appearance, even if impressive and strong, does not bear meaning in itself. It needs to be situated in a context in order to become a meaningful part of the past, of lived experience and memory.

Taking into account Lubben's suggestions, I would now like to look at Seymour's contact sheets as historical documents and filmic traces of his journey.[23]

The first film (and contact sheet), starts with several photographs of Roggiano Gravina, the first village visited by Seymour. While these photographs were taken at a distance, others were taken at close range. We see impressive portraits of elderly


1. BATTLE AGAINST ILLITERACY. At the Adult Education Center in Roglano Gravina, province of Calabria, Southern Italy, an old peasant finishes his first lesson in writing. 700 adults come to schools in the village every night after their full day's work.

4 - A piece of ground on a hill over-looking Reglano Gravina which was granted recently by the city hall to the Centre.

6 - Old peasant at his beginner's class in writing. After successful work with young peasants, the Centre is making efforts to attract women and aged people.

Fig. 9.1: Double spread of Seymour's UNESCO album with contact sheets, reprinted from Hendel, Naggar, and Priem, *They Did Not Stop at Eboli*, 56–57.

23 For facsimiles of Seymour's contact sheets, together with captions and comments, see Hendel, Naggar, and Priem, *They Did Not Stop at Eboli*. Seymour's contact sheets and his photo story on the fight against illiteracy in Southern Italy can be found in two archives: one copy can be found in the Magnum Archives in New York and a second copy with the same content was recently found in the UNESCO Archives in Paris. According to the Magnum rules, Seymour selected photographs for publication and added captions and comments to his selection of pictures on the fight against illiteracy in Southern Italy. While Magnum always respected the intimacy of contact sheets and the photographer's choice, this was not the case with UNESCO, which made its own decisions, often ignoring the photographer's preferences. On Seymour's album as a tool for editing and storytelling, see Karin Priem, "David Seymour's Album on the Fight against Illiteracy in Calabria as a Tool of Mediatization: Material Traces and Visual Storytelling," in Hendel, Naggar, and Priem, *They Did Not Stop at Eboli*, 263–274.

men sitting in a classroom and concentrating on writing exercises. This difference in perspective makes us aware of some often neglected aspects of photography: photographs are taken in real time, in real places, and the photographer has to move and connect to his/her surrounding environment. After all, documentary photography is an embodied social practice.[24] Photography not only implies physical movement to achieve a change of perspective, but also involvement at a social level. Seymour's work as a photographer not only consisted of pushing the release button at a certain moment in time; it also meant approaching a small village as a foreigner, walking in the streets, watching and being watched, sensing and listening, talking to the locals who speak a foreign dialect, building up trust, collecting information, asking to be granted access, etc.

Seymour did well and seems to have created a trustful atmosphere. His first contact prints show not only impressive close-ups of adults and old men learning how to write, but also various interior classroom scenes featuring adolescents, women, and children. Seymour managed to be respectful and sensitive, and to create an atmosphere of concentration and serenity. After his first sequence of indoor pictures,

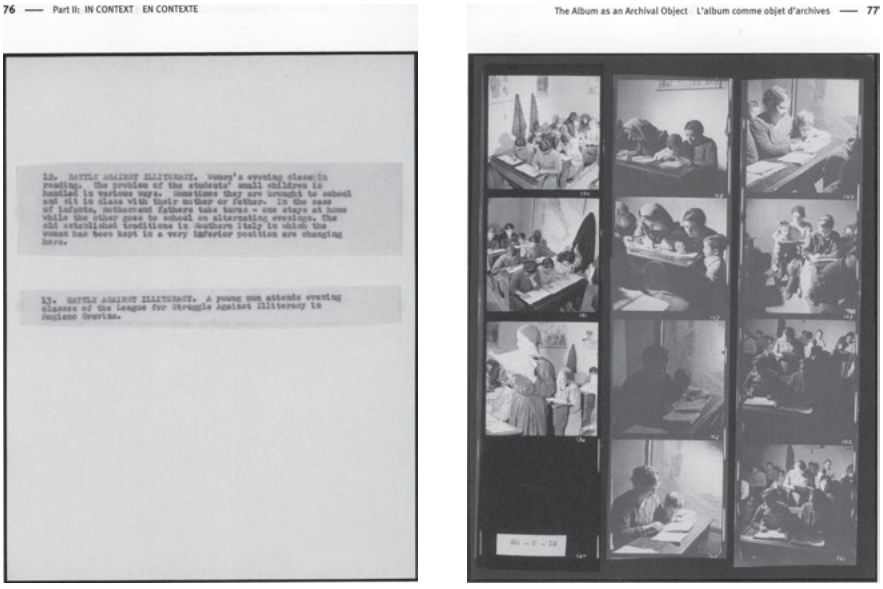


Fig. 9.2: Double spread of Seymour's UNESCO album with contact sheets, reprinted from Hendel, Naggar, and Priem, *They Did Not Stop at Eboli*, 76–77.

24 This multisensorial approach to photography is also discussed by Inés Dussel, "Photos Found in the Archive: An Approximation to the Work with Images Based on an Amateur Album on Children's Games (Argentina, Late Nineteenth Century)," *Historia y Memoria de la Educación* 10 (2019): 91–129.

Seymour returned to the open air. Again, he chose to capture distant views, but we also see street scenes showing women carrying heavy loads on their heads, a photograph of two goats and a child, and of a group of women and children concentrating on writing exercises and handicrafts at the entrance to their house. Seymour slowly approached the women and children in a sequence of three pictures. The contact sheet's last photograph shows another distant view of Roggiano Gravina.

It was probably the following day that Seymour went back indoors and photographed classrooms with young boys and girls concentrating on their writing exercises and playing music on stage; the last two images of this contact sheet show a group of children walking through an arch. After taking this photograph, Seymour had to pause and reload his camera. He walked through the arch himself and took some pictures from the opposite perspective before continuing to wander through the streets of Roggiano Gravina. The next contact sheet shows a medical doctor examining a young man accompanied by a woman who is presumably his mother. Seymour then captured additional classroom scenes showing a mixed age group consisting of young boys and elderly men. On the following contact sheet, we see several photographs of a well-dressed middle-aged man – Seymour's comment identifies him as Giuseppe Zanfini, the director of the local center for popular culture and education – reading a letter to a mother and her child. These pictures are followed by more impressive classroom scenes of girls and mothers accompanied by their young children. The photographs of the classrooms testify to the peasants' shared and intergenerational focus on learning.

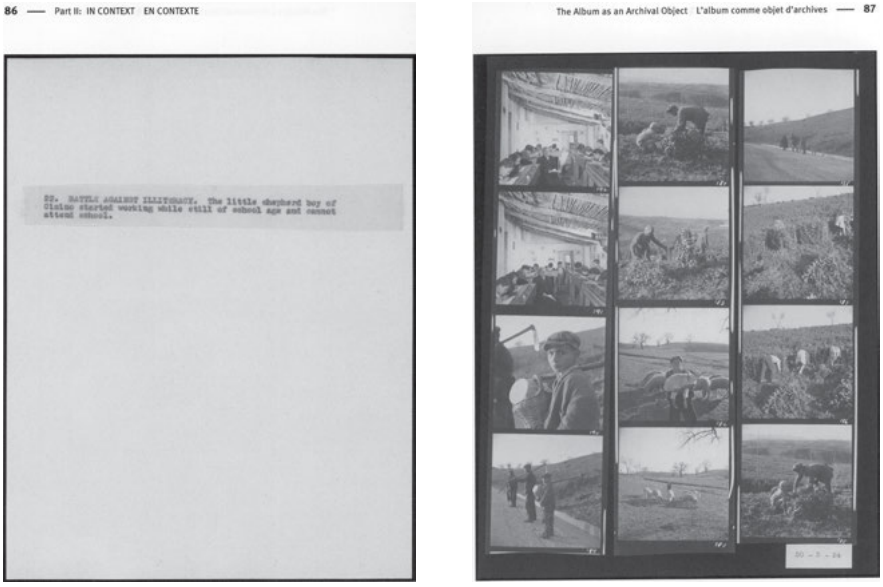


Fig. 9.3: Double spread of Seymour's UNESCO album with contact sheets, reprinted from Hendel, Naggar, and Priem, *They Did Not Stop at Eboli*, 86–87.

David Seymour then seems to have moved on to Cimino, a nearby village. Along the route he photographed men working in the fields, evoking his famous photographs of the Spanish Civil War. As he approached Cimino, Seymour took several images of a stable that had been turned into a school building with a group of children in front of it. Again, Seymour had to reload his camera while the children walked into the stable and sat down on the benches. He then took some impressive indoor images of this classroom, highlighting the lack of proper education facilities in Calabria. Directly in front of the stable door, Seymour's eye was drawn to a shepherd tending to his sheep and three decorative amphoras in the foreground. Again, he had to reload his camera, and he continued his exploration with pictures showing peasants working in the fields. He took a seminal and very sensitive portrait of a young shepherd he met on the road, and we can see that his first image of the boy was taken at a distance. He visited another makeshift classroom (most probably in the next village) and took some more indoor photographs of the students and their female teacher.

The following contact sheet shows pictures that were taken in another poor village, San Nicolo de Crissa. Photographs of a classroom with young boys and an adult man practicing reading are juxtaposed with a stunning and emotionally loaded portrait of a young boy with big eyes and an open face. Back outside, Seymour took a picture of a woman who was managing to simultaneously carry a toddler in her arms and vegetables on her head. Two additional street scenes follow. He reloaded his camera, continued walking, and took more street photographs of two young girls wearing warm shawls (though one of the girls wore no shoes) and a close-up shot of an elderly woman in traditional costume. The next photographs on this contact sheet were again taken in a classroom with poor lighting (three negatives came out dark); the learners were adult men, including a father accompanied by a charming and alert looking toddler who attracts the viewer's attention.

The next contact sheet starts with photographs of a classroom in another village showing a boy standing in front of a torn map of Europe. Other photographs on the same contact sheet confirm that Seymour had been walking on narrow mountain paths to visit the different villages.

The pictures on the next contact sheet were taken in the village of Saucci. They show another stable that had been turned into a school building. The following two contact sheets again feature distant views of the area, mountain paths, a farmhouse with a traditional outdoor oven, an interior with no furniture and no windows, a wonderful portrait of a young boy taking a rest, and more poor dwellings and families encountered by Seymour during his tour of the mountain villages. The next contact sheets not only show more of the same; they also reveal something of how Seymour took portraits of local people. He usually started by photographing them from a distance and then took one or two more pictures before deciding to take a final close-up shot. We see a girl walking with a goat, carrying a basket and a heavy load on her head; the village teacher on his scooter being pushed by the children in bad weather; a young boy and a donkey in front of a stable; women and men

working and resting in the fields; more women carrying heavy loads. Seymour subsequently returned to Roggiano Gravina. There, he took nine impressive photographs of an evening school, focusing in particular on a young shepherd and an intelligent looking middle-aged man doing reading exercises. The medium-format contact sheets end with more landscape impressions and two pictures of a group of male adolescents looking out of a window.[25]

Seymour used the technology of the camera and the mobility of his body to record specific moments in time at different sites and from different angles and perspectives. Photographic technology and photography as an embodied practice had additional effects on Seymour's work. Each film roll of his medium-format camera had twelve exposures, which forced him to pause after each sequence to reload.[26] The analog technology also meant that he could not immediately see what he had captured; he had to wait until the film was developed and the contact prints were available. This gap in time added reflection and imagination to the process of image-making. While taking photographs in Calabria, Seymour's focus was not just on classrooms, teachers and students, but also on the technology, aesthetics and ethics of photography; he was interested in conversations and information about the work of the Italian National League for the Fight Against Illiteracy (UNLA), and a wide range of issues such as street life, medical infrastructure, work, family homes, animals, gender, landscape, children, adults, the elderly, leisure time, facial expressions, lifestyles, and clothes. With the help of photography, Seymour carefully explored the entire cosmos of Calabria from the perspective of how it might potentially serve to improve reading and writing, or how it represented an obstacle to that process. Seymour most probably took field notes; however, his full photo story was only created when he could see the results of his work. He looked at the traces and appearances he had brought back on his contact sheets, selected photographs for print, and designed storylines that he wrote on a typewriter. His photo story not only included selected photographs but also basic statistical data, background information on local committees dedicated to the fight against illiteracy, life stories, daily experiences, the names of the people he had met and talked to, and his own thoughts and observations. He created meaning by contextualizing the visual traces he gathered. However, also in hindsight and upon his return from Calabria, Seymour's main focus was on encounters and experiences with real-life people and their struggle to achieve literacy.

25 Seymour also took photographs with a smaller Leica camera. Many of these photographs were duplicates of his medium-format pictures.

26 Medium-format film rolls usually contain twelve exposures. The camera has to be reloaded accordingly. Most of Seymour's contact sheets show twelve 1:1 prints of his negatives; sometimes, however, the light conditions were affecting his work or he decided to finish a film roll earlier, resulting in a smaller number of images on the corresponding contact sheets.

Conclusion

Both Carlo Levi and David Seymour used images and texts to explore social and educational problems. However, their approaches differed in focus and outcome. Levi, a politically active artist, favored a thorough analysis of the problematic causalities of hierarchical and suppressive societal structures. He repeatedly offered interpretations and looked at the situation from the meta-perspective of a knowledgeable intellectual. A look at Seymour's work shows that his mind was not so much set on generalizing, categorizing, and interpreting his experiences. Instead, he lets us participate in an embodied experience, in what there was to see, where he walked, whom he met, and how he changed his perspective with his camera in a non-representational way.[27] Everything and everybody were equally relevant. Seymour does not universalize what he experienced. Quite the opposite: his work offers sequences of moments in time that for him operate on the same level of immanence.[28] Seymour often started his work from a distant perspective and only then decided on close-ups, an approach which in many cases led to excellent results. He worked in the opposite direction from Levi by first selecting a general view and then moving to closer views. Today, his portraits of the people of Calabria are considered works of art.

This chapter focuses on how documentary photographs by David Seymour and journalistic texts by Carlo Levi provide different modes of observing, referring to reading and writing as ways of taking possession of the world. The more analytical and intellectual approach of Levi is countered by the exploring gaze of a photographer whose attention was drawn to a wide range of things and issues. Seymour was interested in almost everything and everybody he saw, and he uses different perspectives to study the environment. He often decided on close-ups after having carefully approached a situation. This is also important from the perspective of history

27 Lynn Fendler describes non-representational theory as a theory where everything "exists on the same epistemological plane"; see Lynn Fendler, "The Ethics of Materiality: Some Insights from Non-Representational Theory," in *Educational Research: Material Culture and Its Representation*, ed. Paul Smeyers and Marc Depaepe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 115–132, quotation on 117. She argues that non-representational theory does not look for dominant causalities and refrains from defining (essentialist) structures; instead, "beliefs, atmospheres, sensations, ideas, toys, music, ghosts, dance therapists, footpaths, pained bodies, trance music, reindeer, plants, boredom, fat, anxieties, vampires, cars, enchantment, nanotechnologies, water voles, GM foods, landscapes, drugs, money, racialized bodies, political demonstrations" etc. – Fendler here cites the open-ended list of materialities in Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison's *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography* (Routledge, 2010), 119 – are seen as equally important elements of human experience.

28 In his introduction to *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), Henri Cartier-Bresson argued that there is a specific "decisive moment" in photography. This rationale was questioned and demystified by Peter Galassi in a 1987 exhibition catalogue entitled *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Early Work* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1987).

of education: Seymour often concentrated on reading and writing as a means of subjectification without neglecting material, economic, and cultural contexts.[29] Using his photographs as mediating agents, he designed a story by picking out individual images and adding comments and captions to these images. This story is neither analytical nor interpretational, but presentational. It is an empathic and respectful story about the people of Calabria, their lives, and their specific struggle for education. This result also implies that historians of education have to take into account the pitfalls of interpretation and be aware of what they do to photographs by visual analysis. They are advised to pause, look closely at what is presented in a photograph or rather a series of photographs, and be open to surprises and new discoveries that go against the grain of established hermeneutics, structural analysis, and prevalent trends of macro-analytical global and transnational histories of education.

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29 Karin Priem, "Visual, Literary, and Numerical Perspectives on Education: Materiality, Presence, and Interpretation," in *Educational Research: Material Culture and Its Representation*, ed. Paul Smeyers and Marc Depaepe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 53–69.

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