पंचमुखी नाग के दर्शन सोमवार को जमशेदपुर से ३५ कि.मी. दूर चांदली इलाके में हुए
इसकी लंबाई ६० फीट है पंचमुखी नागदेवता के दर्शन दुर्लभ माने जाते है

#17

Hindutva Camera

Christopher Pinney

Ganga the Cow

I first heard about Ganga, the cow, from Girdharilal, the veterinary assistant who I often encountered as he headed off on his bike to deliver artificial insemination in nearby villages. Ganga, he said was *ascharya* and *heran* (wondrous). She was either 14 or 15 years old when she fell pregnant. Her belly swelled in the normal way: this was not the first time for she had been pregnant 18 months earlier. But when she came to birth, she produced twins, one male and one female who were named Raja and Lakshmi. It is very common for goats to have twins. But cows, at least in this part of India, never birth more than one calf, until, that is, Ganga managed it. Word spread quickly in the village and numerous villagers came with their mobiles to photograph this amazing event. Mobiles clicked away at this true wonder, and stored the evidence so that they could confound any future visitor who for perfectly good reasons might doubt the truth of such an unlikely story. As a backup, a studio photographer from the nearby town was also called, not by Ganga's owner, but by a villager who had a heightened investment in the miraculous.

Ganga's calves are emblematic of a wondrous realism, an evidential register that is sometimes dependent on Photoshop. This term I propose as an addition to the familiar photographic duality of 'instrumental realism' and 'sentimental realism'. Villagers are invested in the photographic documentation of these occurrences because they provide evidence for and validation of their subjugated worldview. The camera phone generates 'proofs' akin to the crystals that are salvaged from the fields as signs of the Goddess Sitala. Villagers perceive themselves as oppressed by urban life worlds. In rural lifeworlds, wondrous events are of different kinds and happen with different frequencies, but until now they have always gone unrecorded.

Cow Protection Photography

The verso of a late nineteenth-century cabinet card, designed for the Mathura studio of Chunni Lall and Bhawani Ram, depicts a cow (inscribed *kamdhenu*[1] in Devanagri) under a tree. This simple and attractive logo is resonant with mythological significance. Mathura is in the center of the legendary mythic landscape of Braj where Krishna raised Mount Gowardhan to protect cattle from a dangerous monsoon deluge (see Ray 2019:40-42). This episode is elaborated in numerous chomolithographic depictions.

  In early photographic incarnations the protection of the cow manifests benignly. Photography, however, has played a malign role in recent violent events. In late September 2015, to recall one of many examples, in the village of Bisahra, not far from Delhi, a furious mob of 1,000 high caste Hindus surged down a tiny alleyway towards the home of Mohammad Akhlaq. They believed that he had slaughtered and eaten a cow, so they killed him. His body was dumped next to the cow's entrails. This killing was one symptom of a resurgence of anti-cow slaughter sentiment at the heart of which is the present Indian Government's underlining of the illegality of beef consumption. The 'ideal' of abstention and cow protection, becomes the alibi for participating in violence against beefeaters, and the 'protection' of the Cow Mother (*gai mata*), effervesced by photographic 'documentation' on social media (Banaji & Bhat 2019), becomes the rational for the destruction of those who refuse to participate in this ideological project. Banaji and Bhat report 'widespread, simmering distrust, hatred, contempt and suspicion towards […] Muslims, Dalits and […] dissenting citizens' among rural and urban middle and upper castes. This distrust is frequently fueled by WhatsApp videos purportedly documenting cow-slaughter. Banaji and Bhat document a focus group held in Nagda, during which one respondent reported being sent such a video with the accompanying message that 'only true Hindus would share this'. The respondent did indeed then share the video, explaining that 'sometimes you have to share it because what they [the Muslims] are doing is wrong'.

[1] The divine 'cow of plenty'.

Cattle have an intimate relationship to the camera. Throughout my research in central India, from the early 1980s onwards, I have frequently been asked to photograph villagers with bulls, well-loved cows, and to document various ritual engagements with cattle such as at Akhateej and Govardhan puja, occasions when the material dependency on cattle is wonderfully performatively evoked. In Gowardhan puja, after Dipali, animals are decorated and worshipped before trampling through elaborate opulent dung images of Radha and Krishna, and Mount Govardhan, which female villagers sculpt with noticeably sensuous care. One framed image, recording a magical bull from Aslod, c. 1980, who refused to be taken to slaughter, and spoke out to his owner was one of the earliest photographs to catch my attention in the village (Pinney 1997:165).

When I arrived in Nagda in mid-October 2015, I asked Bheru, the porter who had met me at the station, whether he had seen any new cow protection imagery. He told me he had just received a WhatsApp video that purported to show two cows being slaughtered outside a mosque in Pakistan. He immediately played it to me on his mobile, both of us looking on with horror at the butchery. My own horror was driven not only by the violence of the scene but a recognition of what might be termed 'memetic' contagion, a sense of the virality of the image jumping from viewer to viewer. Later a Jain friend would post an image of a three-headed calf on my Facebook page, evidence of divine resistance. In the journey from the Chunni Lall verso to modern digital demands-to-act one becomes aware not only of transformations in media, and radical accelerations in the velocity of images, but also how, in the cause of supposedly preserving life, it is death that is glorified.
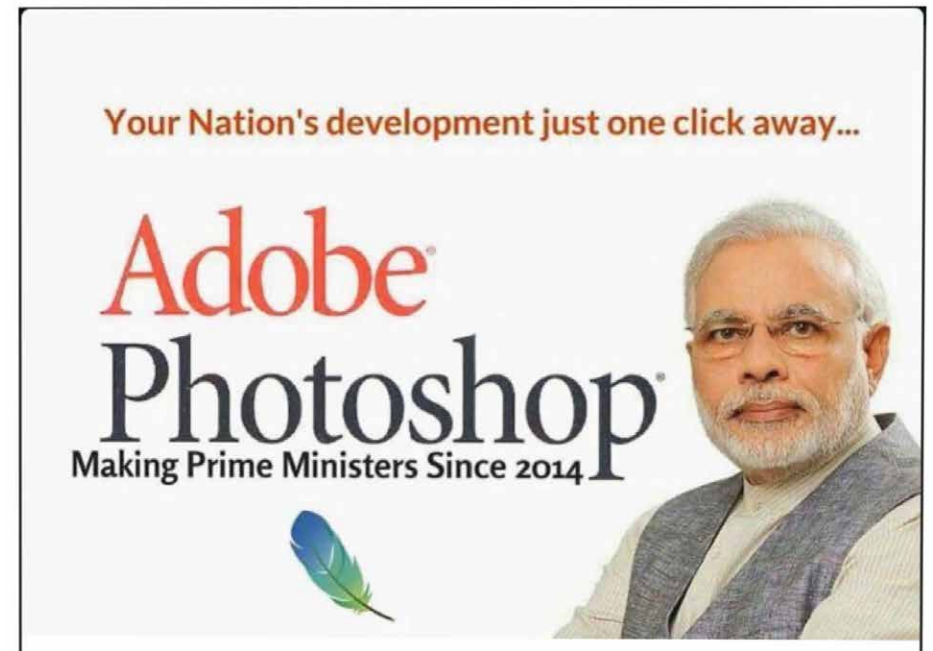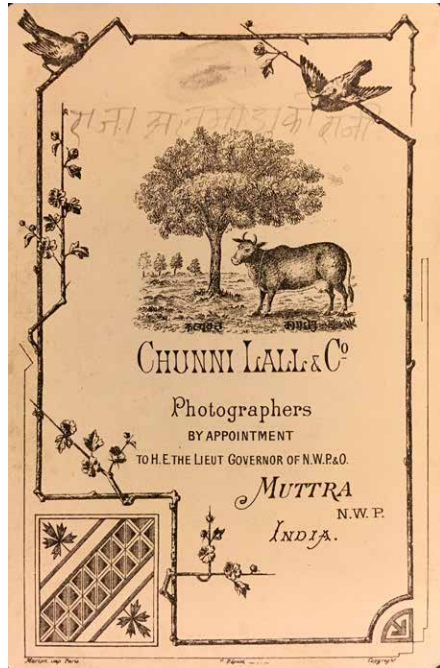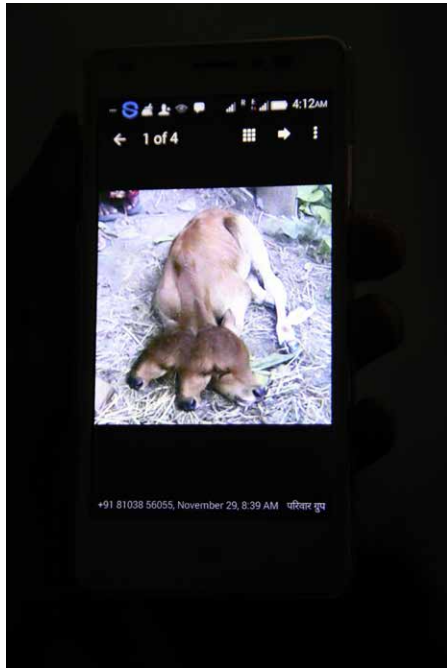
Incredible India

Politics everywhere, but especially in India, appears increasingly a work of the imagination. Inconvenient monuments can be recoded or deleted, and what does not yet exist can be conjured on Photoshop. P.N. Oak and others have for long argued through the medium of print that the Taj Mahal was really a Shiva temple, but Photoshop allows the public to actually see the conversion work observed by Tavernier and coats old theories with a compelling new glossiness. Prime Minister Modi is not so much made in India, but rather as one excellent internet meme suggests made by Photoshop. Elected by 'Photoshop power' images detached from the event have played a significant role in Government and Party publicity.

   We should expect as much from a party that has consistently mobilized new media in its national and local campaigns (Baishya 2015). In 2004 the BJP's India Shining campaign marked a new spectacularization of politics, a new kind of politics fought at the level of the image, albeit one which was defeated by a brilliant counter-image

strategy by Congress. In 2012, Musion, the London-based company whose Eyeliner system resurrected Frank Sinatra and Tupac Shakur, worked with Modi to develop the Pepper's Ghost illusion to create a holographic effect (technically speaking not a hologram) allowing Modi to reach remote rural audiences, sometimes at more than 50 locations simultaneously. In 2014 the same technology (deployed by 200 Musion installation crews) was used to project Modi virtually at between 3,500-4,000 'holographic events',[2] many using Musion's mobile shipping containers to reach villages lacking electricity.

   Photoshop's appeal is obvious: it extends the prophetic potential of photography, perfecting its proleptic – future delivering – capability. A Government merely has to desire bullet trains for images of them to materialize magically before us. It merely has to imagine a future Ahmedabad for it to unfurl tangibly in front of our eyes, as long as our vision is not derailed by analogue grit.

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[2] http://musion.com/?portfolio=narendra-modi-campaign-2014

Haathi Goes to Delhi

In late August of 2011, much of India was transfixed by the actions of the septuagenarian neo-Gandhian, Anna Hazare. Fasting, possibly until death (he would curtail his hunger strike on the 13th day), he sat on a stage, in Delhi's Ramlila grounds, underneath a large photographic image of M.K. Gandhi. The events at the Ramlila grounds received ever increasing media coverage: dozens of Indian news channel crews erected their own stages on the edge of the ground, numerous cameras mounted on cranes documented every moment, and the visual image of Anna Hazare as a 'second Gandhi' or 'come-again Gandhi' was beamed across the country 24 hours a day. The extraordinary profusion of handmade images and texts which many protesters brought with them was noteworthy. These ranged from small photocopies – some advocating the hanging of members of the then government or depicting Hazare as a wrestler – to elaborate collaged spreads, to complex cartoons and paintings (often dependent on the pun that Anna Hazare was not *andhi*[3] [blind] but was Gandhi) to Photoshopped visual allegories (*Aj ke Dhritaraashtra*) that depicted Hazare as a modern-day Krishna, fighting – in a re-animation of the Mahabharata struggle – corrupt figures, such as the disgraced head of the Commonwealth Games Committee (Salman Kalmadi) and a politician implicated in a $40 billion 2G telecom spectrum sales scam (A. Raja) these being presided over by the 'blind' Manmohan Singh, who echoes the blind Dhritarashtra. Dhritarashtra, described in the Mahabharata as blind from birth, was the father of the Kauravas, uncle to the five Pandavas with whom his sons fought the Kurukshetra war. He was present when Yudhisthira lost the dice game and remained silent when Dushasana tried to disrobe Draupadi, the Pandava's wife, in front of the court. The disrobing of Draupadi, an episode endlessly visualized in early lithography, and then film and subsequently television (Mankekar 1993) became perhaps the archetypal trope of a subjugated India whose chastity was threatened by colonizers.

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[2] This involves a grammatical distortion: the male *andha* is made female (*andhi*) to facilitate the rhyme.

Other imagery on display mobilized maps of India with Mother India at the center flanked by images of Gandhi and Anna Hazare with slogans such as *Brastachar Bharat Choro* ('Corruption Quit India!') or maps of India in front of which were depicted three monkeys illustrating the (originally Japanese) visual proverb 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil'. Gandhi was very attached to a small wooden carving of three monkeys gifted to him by Chinese devotees. These seem to creatively deform the original east Asian motif into a warning about the dangers of a government, which chooses not to see what is occurring in front of it: the images served as demands *to look at* and confront evil in the form of corruption. One protester at the post-fast 'victory' celebrations at Indian Gate brought his own placard, which depicted a blindfolded Manmohan Singh unable to see his ministers scurrying away with briefcases filled with cash, under the slogan *Yeh hai hamari andhi sarkar // puri Bhrast* ('This is our blind government: completely corrupt').

Leaving Delhi and heading ten hours by train south to the town and village in Madhya Pradesh, I found myself speaking with Kalaish '*Haathi*' ('Elephant'), a commercial photographer and old friend. It turned out that he had travelled to the Ramlila grounds a week earlier in order to express his political support for the Hazare campaign. Somehow I had missed him. A friend had commented that there was no evidence of anyone from Malwa (this area of Madhya Pradesh) at the protests and that someone should go. Hence Kailash decided to paint himself in Indian national colors and (having affixed a spindly tail) incarnate himself as Hanuman. Being a photographer and having a son engaged in the family business ensured that his departure for Delhi was extensively photographically documented, and it was also covered by a local cable news network. But this was nothing compared to what (using the English phrase) he termed the 'total media coverage' that awaited him in Delhi. Here he was interviewed by dozens of journalists and asked to dance continuously in a roped-off area in front of the main stage upon which Hazare sat. Kailash excitedly told me about his appearance on the

'Urdu channel, English channel, your Gujarati channel. Channels in the south. Wherever there is in the world, in all those channels. I went through the whole world. Also in China. A friend who works there for the factory rang his relative in Delhi and he told me that he's seen Hanuman walking in Delhi'.

Back in Madhya Pradesh, his son used his mobile to film his father's numerous appearances on national television, and I was shown mp4-footage on the computer in their photo studio in another display of 'folded' media.

One could argue that Anna Hazare movement's chief legacy is mass public support for the *Aadhaar*, the Unique Identification Scheme in India. I was able to get myself enrolled, temporarily, in November 2012 and experience the procedure at first hand. This system attaches a twelve-digit number to a facial photograph, retinal scans, and finger and thumb prints of every Indian citizen. The initial plan was that, once 'all residents are enrolled', it would be impossible to activate a cell phone SIM, open a bank account, or travel in any reserved category on the railways without this twelve-digit number. *Aadhar* is an astonishingly ambitious database with huge potential for state misuse, and yet every village and small-town resident with whom I have spoken embraces this project warmly. Their self-willed interpellation into the state appears to promise a freedom through visibility. As one lowly paid laborer (in whom I had hoped to find evidence of subaltern resistance) told me, once he had his number he would be able to travel the whole length of India without *rok-tok* ('obstacles' or 'obstructions'). Others stress the manner in which the 'number' (*nambar*) will prevent those without entitlement from claiming Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards giving them access to subsidized rations. State surveillance, in other words, promises to regulate corruption.

The (perhaps surprising) enthusiasm for *Aadhaar* by those who see in it the Utopian possibility of finally achieving a citizenship of proper entitlement and free passage expresses a desire for a new form of contract between citizen and state of the kind that the Anna Hazare campaign foregrounded. This willing embrace of the necessity of making oneself visible to the state can be seen as one response to

the persistent discourses around state blindness that emerged in anti-corruption agitations. Citizen-produced imagery repeatedly conjured a state blind to the injustices suffered by its citizens. Manmohan Singh was depicted as the blind king Dhritrashtra, and as head of an *andhi sarkar* ('a blind government'). In choosing to see only the benefits of *Aadhaar*, rather than its potentially huge disciplinary capability, Indians might be understood to be seeking the rectification of an imbalance in the distribution of the visible in ways that would not surprise Jacques Rancière (2009:99). In India, as elsewhere, a movement of dissent has lain the foundations for a future regime, which is able to better regulate dissent.

Talisman

6th October 2018: Evening visit to Omprakash Shekhawat who I have known since the early 1980s. Over the years he has become more and more active in the BJP, the chauvinist party which has been in power nationally since 2014. There are many framed photographs hanging in his front room, which show him standing next to or hugging various regional senior BJP leaders. I copied numerous images from his phone including several of his son's wedding in which he appears like the mighty potentate of some fabled small state of yore. I then came across one of the current local Nagda-Khacharod constituency MLA, one Dilip Singh Shekawat, who I had often encountered at various functions in Nagda. On one occasion I drove with him and his security to a village function; whenever the car approached a newly repaired pothole (which could conceivably conceal a landmine), one of his security guards was made to get out of the car and walk over the suspect area.
The photograph showed him wearing a saffron *pagdi* (turban) and smiling at some political rally. The bottom half of the party logo (a lotus) was visible at the top of the image. 'Take a copy and keep it on your phone', Omprakash insisted. 'Then, if you have any problems you can tell them you copied it from Omprakash Shekhawat who is a friend of Dilip Singh Shekhawat'.

   I was put in mind of the anecdote with which Barthes begins *Camera Lucida* and which, he suggests, opens a primal question for photography to which after a long 'cultural turn' his book marks a return. He recalls, 'quite some time ago', seeing a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother dating from 1852. He realized 'with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: 'I am looking at the eyes that looked at the Emperor''. This un-diminished amazement refused to go away and he 'was overcome by an 'ontological' desire: I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was 'in itself'' (1981:3). How does the 'ontological desire' survive in the age of smart phones? My phone camera saw Omprakash's screen, whose camera saw Dilip. The indexical chain was as powerful as seeing the eyes that saw the Emperor.

Mixed media

All media is mixed, Marshall McLuhan once claimed, and images, as Arjun Appadurai and Richard Davis have shown, have 'lives' (Appadurai 1986; Davis 1997). The afterlife of an image of a five-headed snake presents evidence also of what Roland Barthes called 'wavy meaning'. In 2010, a startling photograph was printed in a local newspaper. As the caption explained, it showed a five-headed cobra, about ten feet long, which had been seen near a village called Chandali, about 35 kilometers, from the steel city of Jamshedpur. This crudely-pixelated image was re-photographed by an enterprising local photographic studio, Maheshwari Colour Lab, who then sold prints for lamination to many eager villagers, with a view to their use in *puja* rooms. Those villagers assumed that the image had been captured on a mobile phone: technology had at last proved itself capable of picturing a messianic peasant world in which such things were commonplace. They were commonplace not only because villagers say they have seen such snakes occasionally in their own fields, but because it is part of the sculptural tradition that surrounds them. Vishnu as Sheshyai Naga with a similar multiheaded cloak is the central sculpture in the largest temple in the nearby town (a show-piece anachronistic edifice built by the industrialist G.D. Birla) and there are numerous printed images echoing this in the village – such as a baby Krishna being protected by a cobra hood while he is taken to safety during a storm – and smaller sculptural presences (copper five-headed cobras typically protect the tops of village Shivalingams). The original newspaper image served as a prototype for further iterations which became even more popular.

The newspaper photograph of a five-headed cobra thus entered a field, which had already been authorized sculpturally. Inculcated in this pervasive iconography, there was nothing especially surprising from a villager's perspective that such a creature had finally been photographed and perhaps nothing surprising either about the way in which this photographic evidence would be folded back into ritual practice. The photograph would serve as an explicit prototype for an ambitious public sculpture – a thirty-foot long *murti*, made of hessian and straw, to be processed in that (and the next year's) *Tejas Dasmi* procession.

पंचमुखी नाग

पंचमुखी नाग के दर्शन जमशेदपुर से 35 किमी दूर चांदली इलाके में हुए । इसकी लंबाई 10 फीट है।

Here is what Deleuze might have called a media fold, an origami like compression in which inside and outside become difficult to distinguish, and volume and flatness are entangled in new ways (Deleuze 1992). It is also a demonstration of the logic of that fluidarity, which McKim Marriott sought to place at the center of his ethnosociology of India (Marriott 1990). This fluid, oscillating spectrum, fold, or circle, which continually refigures the borders between photography and sculpture is a striking space of exchange and translation. It is very different from the stable terrain predicted by the 'solidarities' of official western social theory, and perhaps, some Art History. Sculpture becomes photograph, which becomes sculpture, which becomes photograph and so on.

It is tempting to see this as one sign of a brave new digital world, where everything is fresh and different. But we might also recall the famous essay that the pioneering film-maker D. G. Phalke wrote for the nationalist journal *Navyug* in 1917-18 in which he described sitting in a cinema hall, watching the *Life of Christ* and thinking 'why we don't we make moving pictures featuring our own gods? I was determined

to do my duty…with the firm conviction that the Indian people would get an occasion to see Indian images on the screen…Mountains, rivers, oceans, houses, human beings, animals, birds, [we might add here, 'snakes'] everything on the screen is real'. his was what Phalke called the 'miracle of the visual' (cited by Rajadhyaksha 1987:47). In rural Malwa, it is Chinese mobile phones that now capture these magical fleeting moments, seemingly contingent, but which most villagers know to be already written in advance.

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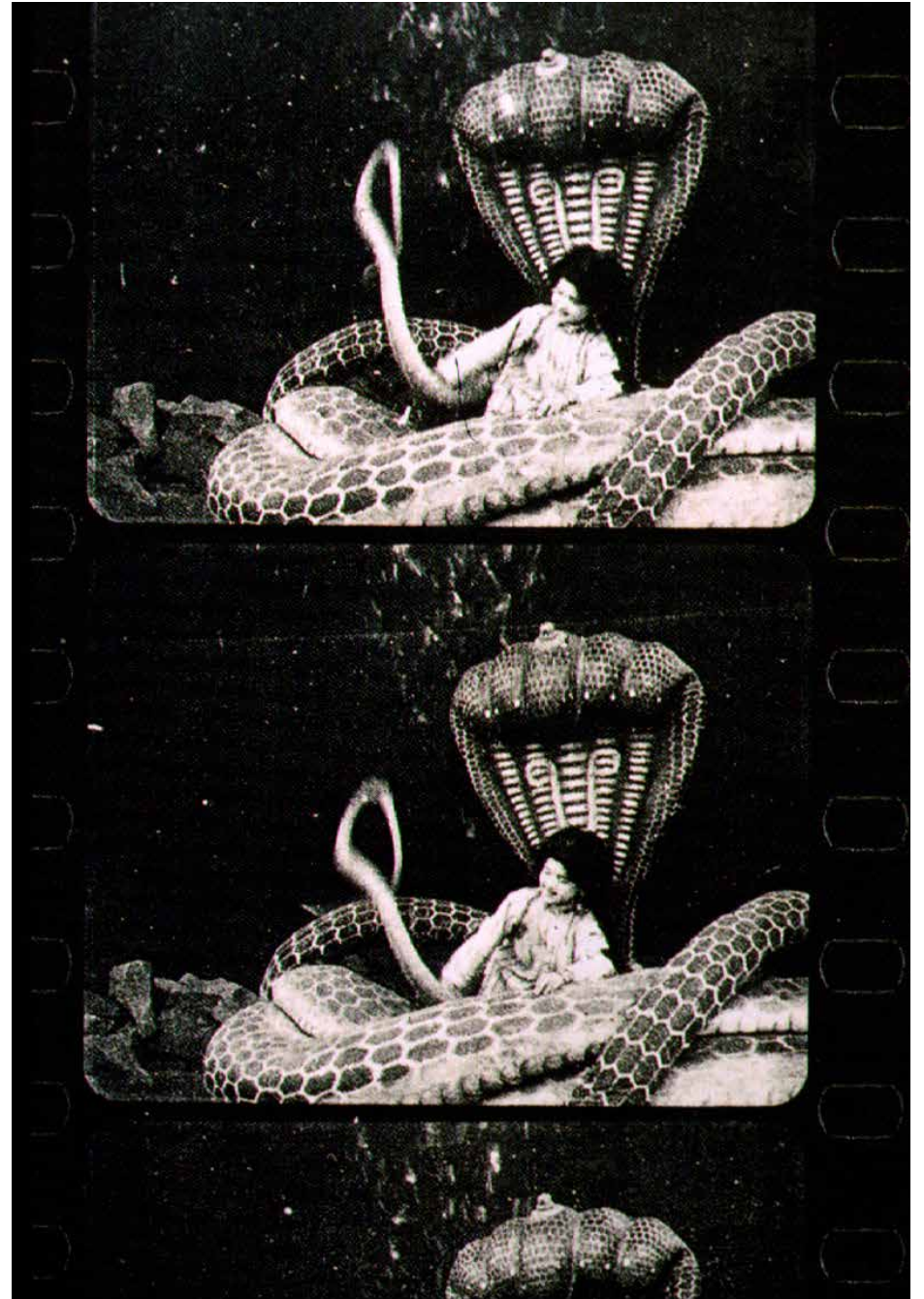
Citizens of Photography: the Camera and the Political Imagination

The PhotoDemos project is an empirical anthropological investigation into the relationship between "representation" through everyday images and "representation" through politics.

The PhotoDemos Collective is a group of six researchers.

The names of the researchers and the countries in which they researched are:
Naluwembe Binaisa (Nigeria)
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